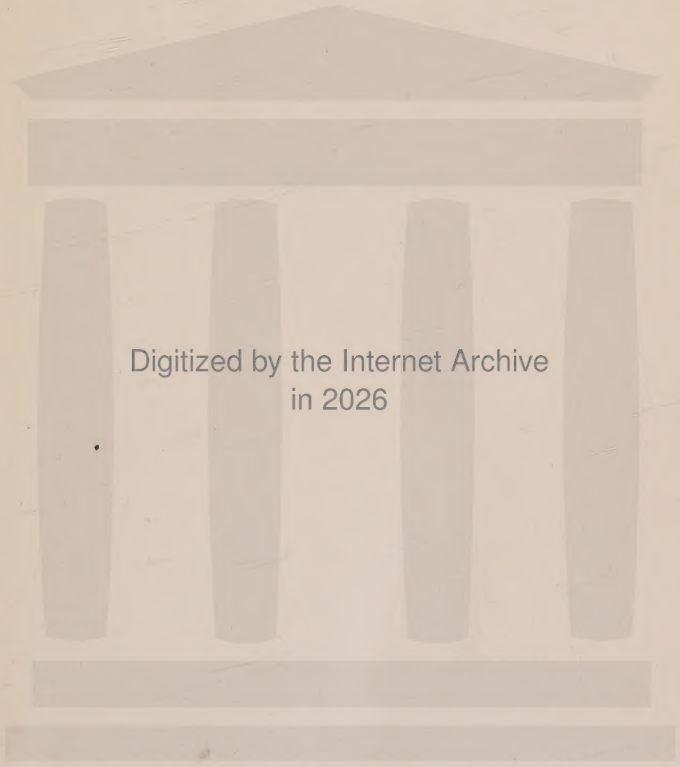
The DUTY of IMPERIAL THINKING

WATKINSON



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The Duty of Imperial Thinking

AND OTHER CHAPTERS ON
THEMES WORTH WHILE

BY

WILLIAM L. WATKINSON, D.D., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE BLIND SPOT," "THE BANE AND THE ANTIDOTE,"
ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

SECOND EDITION
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FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

170
W336d

New York : 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago : 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto : 27 Richmond St., W.
London : 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh : 100 Princes Street

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	On Thinking Imperially	9
II.	The Ashes of Roses	14
III.	Fascination of Difficulty	17
IV.	The Poles of the Moral World	20
V.	The Sorrows of Superiority	24
VI.	The Divine Source of Redemption	27
VII.	Put Yourself in His Place	31
VIII.	The Charmed Life of the Frail	35
IX.	The Dilemmas of Duty	39
X.	The Tyranny of Time	43
XI.	Subconsciousness	47
XII.	The Divine Protestation	51
XIII.	Specious Sin	56
XIV.	The Forlorn Rescue	61
XV.	Secular Weapons in the Spiritual War	65
XVI.	The Unnaturalness of Moral Surrender	70
XVII.	The City : its Sin and Saviour	75
XVIII.	The Moral of the Empty Grave	81
XIX.	Progressive Revelation	86

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CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	Faddism in Faith and Character	90
XXI.	Defence and Defiance	94
XXII.	Ploughing the Sands	99
XXIII.	Elevation and Vision	104
XXIV.	Elevation and Strength	109
XXV.	Elevation and Safety	114
XXVI.	Elevation and Peace	118
XXVII.	Deferred Blessing	123
XXVIII.	The Fatuity of Religious Indifference	129
XXIX.	The Sleeping Sickness	135
XXX.	The Efficacy of Joy	141
XXXI.	A Human Document	147
XXXII.	The Discipline of the Disagreeable	152
XXXIII.	Humility	157
XXXIV.	Differentiations in Excellence	163
XXXV.	Truth	169
XXXVI.	Indirection	174
XXXVII.	What we May Do towards our Salvation	181
XXXVIII.	The Devil's Riddle	188
XXXIX.	The Grand Goal and the Lowly Path	195
XL.	Passive Faith	202
XLI.	Faith and Morals	206
XLII.	Reality and Range in Christian Faith	210
XLIII.	The Condition of Righteousness	215
XLIV.	Masked Perils of Spiritual Life and Fellowship	220

CHAPTER		PAGE
XLV.	The Transformations of Grace	225
XLVI.	The Graciousness of the Law	229
XLVII.	Vicarious Faith	234
XLVIII.	The Grandeur and Graciousness of God	238
XLIX.	Spasmodic Piety	243
L.	The Choir Invisible and Their Music	249
LI.	The Mercy of Mystery	254
LII.	The Hour, and the Divine Deliverer	259
LIII.	The Implied Promise of Nature and Life	264

I

ON THINKING IMPERIALLY

For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy work; I will triumph in the works of Thy hands. O Lord, how great are Thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.—Ps. xcii. 4-6.

THE psalmist indulges in grand conceptions and celebrations, which fill him with delight; he is enraptured with thoughts of God's works and government. The brutish man and the fool are incapable of these boundless and delightful speculations; they are wholly occupied with narrow, frivolous, sordid interests.

There is the larger thought that arises from the contemplation of God's works. This rapturous passage must contain a reference to the greatness and glory of creation. The psalmist is alive to the beauty of the earth, the wildness of the sea, the magnificence of the heavens, and these appreciations enlarge his heart and fill it with pure enthusiasm. Contemplating the divine grandeurs of nature, he becomes oblivious to the petty thoughts and cares of human life, and bathes his soul in the infinite.

Never was there more pressing need of the larger thought than to-day. Our age is specially materialistic,

industrial, mechanical, commercial, and we are steeped in belittling, coarsening influences. The conditions of modern life seem to forbid that a grain of poetry should be left in our brain, a spark of noble passion in our heart. The ugly, the hard, the vulgar, and the vile are the shades of our prison-house. What, then, is the special antidote and compensation that heaven has provided against this threatening deluge of materialism and meanness? The age of secularism is also the age of science. "God hath even made the one side by side with the other." Side by side with the demoralizing and dwarfing influence of intense material care and passion are discovered sublime things and exquisite things hidden from former generations. Lest an age of tools should make us brutish, and an age of gilded toys make us fools, God has reserved to us the telescope, the spectroscope, the microscope, and other rare instruments to keep us face to face with the splendour and mystery of the world.

Do we duly avail ourselves of the gift of natural knowledge vouchsafed to our generation? A few do, and live in great thoughts; the majority do not, and their brain and heart are choked with rubbish. Naturalists bewail the forlorn lot of the captive bird; but the far worse tragedy is that man himself is caged, his humanity thrust into the narrowest intellectual and sentimental range. It is sad to think how little this glorious world means to the mass of us! Weary and sickened with ephemeral things, absurd ambitions and pleasures, irritating trifles, disheartening commonplaces of scene and experience, let us cultivate more the observant, adoring mood of the psalmist, and at once we

shall lose ourselves and find ourselves in the infinite felicities and marvels of the divine hand. Only as we delight in the work of God can we delight in our own work and find rest to our soul.

Lift, then, your eyes on high and behold the eternal lights, take the wings of the morning, brood over the flower, chase the subtle splendour of minute life through its secret hiding-places, revel in landscapes chequered with glowing colours, listen to the solemn music of the sea, and the weariness of life is gone. "Give me a great thought," was the dying cry of Schiller; it is the agonizing cry of millions of the living, only they do not understand the secret of their discontent. Nature is a repository of the great thoughts of God which science interprets, and in those thoughts our soul walks at large—wonders, worships, and sings. "The world is yours." Do not give nature a passing glance, science an idle moment, but look deeply and lovingly for the secrets of God's wisdom, power, and love; for, as Traherne puts it quaintly yet profoundly: "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars; and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world."

There is, secondly, the larger thought which arises from our study of the government of God and our identification with the great causes that government fosters. In a fine passage Quinet celebrates the day on which he recognized his relation to the whole series of the past ages: "I discovered that frail and circumscribed as I may be, had any form of humanity been

wanting, I should have been other than I am. Old Chaldea, Phenicia, Babylon, Memphis, Judea, Egypt, Etruria, all have had a share in my education, and live in me. Our individual life may seem circumscribed; but looked at as forming a part of the harmony of the ages, it has a force and a meaning we have perhaps little dreamt of." And it is only as we realize our relation to the ages, to all who came before us, to all who succeed us, striving to do our duty to the whole, that we are conscious of dignity, strength, and satisfaction. Thinking imperially, recognizing ourselves in mankind, and becoming its helper, we taste a pure, vast joy impossible to a life centred in mean egotism and the narrow sphere of personal interests.

An essential way to redeem life from insignificance and satiety is to identify ourselves with a great cause. Mr. Sanborn writes thus of Thoreau: "The atmosphere of earnest purpose which pervaded the great movement for the emancipation of the slaves gave to the Thoreau family an elevation of character which was ever after perceptible, and imparted an air of dignity to the trivial details of life." Identification with a great cause imparts elevation to the humblest sincere and intelligent co-worker. One of the best things arising out of political partisanship is that it gives a touch of largeness to lives otherwise paltry and squalid. Identification with the temperance crusade, the cause of purity or mercy, or any other similar movement, lifts men into a larger sphere and creates a satisfying sense of the value and glory of life. A great enthusiasm tends to make small men great, or, at least to evoke the greatness that otherwise would

have remained latent. Best of all, let us recognize in its fullness the government of God bringing in the kingdom of Christ; here we have the sum of all great causes. To plan and pray for the establishment of Christ's reign in the whole earth is indeed to think imperially. Nothing small or mean can dwell in a soul dominated by this great thought and fired by this sublime passion. What many of us need, to forget our sorrows, to banish our weariness, to overcome our indifference and disgust with life, to fill our days with poetry and romance, is to enlist in a great cause, to serve our nation and race, to become workers in that kingdom that ruleth all, and that ruleth all to the end of filling the world with righteousness and peace. "For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands." Naturalists affirm that the size of the fish found in Central Africa is subtly influenced by the dimensions of the lake in which they live, the same species being larger or smaller in proportion to the scale of their habitat. Living in a small world, we men dwindle and wither; but as knowledge and imagination, faith and hope, make us citizens of a vaster universe, corresponding characters of glory are imprinted on our soul.

II

THE ASHES OF ROSES

The fading flower of his glorious beauty.—Isa. xxviii. 1.

In one of his nature-notes Mr. E. K. Robinson suggests the construction of a floral thermometer. "With us the convolvus can stand about one degree more of frost than the dahlia, and the canary-creeper one more than the convolvulus; and one might almost fill a large flower-bed with plants arranged according to their cold-resisting powers, so that on each morning of late autumn and early winter one could see how much frost there had been the night before by the plants that had suffered." But he adds: "When all was done, it would be only a gloomy pleasure that one would derive from counting the deaths of beautiful things." Yet in fact this is what we are ever doing. The world at large is a prepared cemetery, and we pensively mark the lapse of time by the vanishing of dear faces and the fading of beautiful things.

The fairy days of childhood soon flit away as the fairies do. Youthful love and beauty are grains of gold lost whilst they glitter in the coarser sand-heap of time's hour-glass. Bridal blossoms are as illusive as the flowers of a dream. The season when our children are about us is mockingly brief. The sweet

days and ambrosial nights of charming friendship vanish with the rainbow and the falling star. The perfection of our powers is the twinkling of an eye. "All times of our wealth" are snowflakes on the river, one moment white, then gone for ever. Hours of glorious life are auroral gleams. Cherished things of grace and joy perish in the using, as roses crumble into ashes with the dew still upon them. Life is over ere it is well begun, and the relics of its colour and perfume are a few sober memories, as in the museum at Cairo a handful of withered flowers gathered from the coffins of the dead is all that remains of the gardens of the morning world. And, once again, the things and sensations which have eluded us cannot be restored. It is fabled of Eastern magicians that they can take the dust of a flower and by their incantations restore it in phantom form as it was in life. But the ghostly bloom could only be a pathetic reproduction—the dyes, the lustre, the fragrance, all that constituted the fashion and glory of the sweet original, have perished. So by portraits, trinkets, letters, epitaphs, and biographies we seek to perpetuate lost delights; but the aching heart tells how unavailing these tricks are. The photograph of a rainbow, the ashes of a rose, go only a little way to retrieve the lost glories of heaven and earth, and no expedient of love or wisdom can bring back the light of other days.

Let us in the spirit of godliness realise all the gaiety and glory of life. The fading flower of the text is the symbol of pride, indulgence, and worldliness and its end can only be bitter dust. So is it ever with unholy loftiness, show, and jubilation. Verse 5 presents us

with a contrast to our text: "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of His people." Here glory and beauty become consummate and perpetual. In whatever sparkling things you delight, delight also in the Lord. Take every lovely object and delectable moment as gifts from His hand, enjoy everything in His fear, let all be hallowed by His blessing, and the succession of ephemeral pleasures shall enrich your imagination, affections, and character with abiding treasure and joy. Worn by a pure and devout soul fading flowers become amaranth.

Be alert to realise all goodly things as they swim past. The epicurean ought not to be the only one to seize the ever-vanishing pleasures of sight and hearing, of scent and taste, of intellectual rarities, of social felicities, and to joy in the lovely things as bees riot in the dust of beauty; it is the right and privilege of the pure also to grasp fleeting joys and taste their sweetness. To-day, whilst it is called to-day, rejoice in whatever the day brings. Do not say, I will return to this flower. It blooms only for a few sunny hours, and then withers on its stem. As the Italians say: "There is no rose of a hundred days."

My Lord, I find that nothing else will do,
But follow where thou goest, sit at thy feet,
And where I have thee not, still run to meet.
Roses are scentless, hopeless are the morns,
Rest is but weakness, laughter crackling thorns,
If thou, the Truth, do not make them the true:
Thou art my life, O Christ, and nothing else will do.

III

FASCINATION OF DIFFICULTY

Hast thou entered the treasures of the snow, or hast thou seen the treasuries of the hail?—Job xxxviii. 22

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS, returning to the Alps from a visit to Venice, sat down to write a history of avalanches, remarking, "In the long run we really love the sternest things in life best." Symonds's paradox expresses a deep and suggestive truth. We see this in the young, with all their reputed love of ease and indulgence. They leave the most luxurious homes for voyages and campaigns which imply almost incredible hardship and peril. The terrible career is not forced upon them as upon a convict or conscript; they deliberately choose it, they enter upon it as gay as a bridegroom, and they do so with full knowledge of its privations and sufferings. This is a matter of everyday occurrence. They cheerfully quit the primrose paths for steep and rugged ways, every step in which means toil and may mean destruction. Our national history furnishes striking evidence of this strange fascination. With the whole rich world before them, our adventurous forefathers found Arctic exploration specially alluring. In *The Expansion of England* Seeley records this remarkable passion: "Our explorers, naturally but unfortunately, turned their attention to the Polar regions, and so discovered

nothing but frozen oceans, while their rivals (Spanish and Portuguese) were making a triumphal progress on from island unto island at the gateways of the sun." Again, in our own day we have a fresh demonstration in our Alpine climbers of this allurement of difficulty. Not finding severity enough in their national pathway, members of the rich and leisured class voluntarily seek it where a very short step comes between them and death. Like Symonds, they forsake enchanted Venice and the gardens of Italy for the snowy altitudes of the Alps, ice-gulfs, and the loose mountain trembling from on high. Strange that it should be so, yet so it is. Our fear of excessive cold is intense and inveterate; scientists think it is a reminiscence of the awful struggle of primitive man with the ice age: yet it is overcome by the passion for difficulty, the instinct for peril. At the thought of the edelweiss we forget all the gay flowers of the field.

It is not difficult to justify this instinct for stern things, for really we see at last that it is the instinct of self-preservation, the preservation of our higher self through the denial and discipline of our lower self. The gilded youth dandled in the lap of luxury secures his manhood by the wild daring of loss and difficulty—by losing his life he saves it. Seeley says: "Our explorers unfortunately turned their attention to the Polar seas, and so discovered nothing but frozen oceans." Is that the whole truth? Certainly no gold-mines, precious stones, spices, or orchids are found in these frozen regions; yet we cannot be blind to the fact that our national adventure there through many generations has proved a splendid discipline. In the end

the explorers who dared the Polar night discovered something more than frozen oceans: they have secured everything, even the glorious lands at the gateways of the sun. And sad as the summer catastrophes of Switzerland are, Alpine climbing may be the necessary tonic of a rich civilization. One of the deepest instincts of our nature teaches the preciousness of severity.

Life may easily become much too easy. We heard the other day of a lady who, in mistaken compassion, cracked a cocoon so that the butterfly might the more easily escape; but when the pampered creature emerged, it was sickly and colourless, and soon died. The painful effort of escape was essential to its strength and splendour. Through tribulations must we struggle into the higher life of the spirit. We love to review the treasuries of the sun, the wealth of soft and lovely things: let us remember the treasuries of the snow, the noble, holy, and beautiful issues of sanctified hardship and sorrow.

IV

THE POLES OF THE MORAL WORLD

Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight: that Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.—Ps. li. 4.

IT is of first consequence that we clearly perceive and steadily remember the fact of the absolute and eternal antagonism of sin with the nature and purpose of the Almighty. Once permit this great truth to be obscured, and all moral life is relaxed. And in certain quarters strenuous efforts are made to obscure it. Poets and philosophers so speculate on moral evil as to leave the impression that it is not wholly illegitimate, but is in some sense and measure a medium for the manifestation of God's will and the agent of His purpose. One of this school argues that evil and good are fundamentally identical, that they constitute a "double-faced unity." At the very moment of writing we notice in one of the reviews this passage: "The mystery of evil owes its mysteriousness chiefly to the incongruous attributes with which earlier thought invested its author. Clear away these disfigurements, and the moral reproach of the mystery will disappear with them, and evil, freed from all that is malignant, may then find place in the divine scheme, as a stern but faithful minister of its benign purpose."

This is the profoundly false teaching we must resent. Evil cannot be freed from all that is malignant. It is no part of the divine scheme. It is no minister of the benign purpose which dominates the creation. "*Against* Thee have I sinned." This is the immense truth to burn into the soul.

1. Sin is not *from* God. The Old Testament holds this cardinal truth aloft, clear as noonday. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgement: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." The same teaching is everywhere endorsed in the New Testament. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man." "Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above," but the evil determination is from within. Philosophers and mystics vainly dreaming discern the poison and malignity of evil first in God; they infer that it was part of His own substance, and that the confusion of the world springs out of the divine nature: revelation, however, knows nothing of such notions. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." He is the Music that has known no discord, the eternal Beauty who requires no foil and suffers no blemish, Love that never touched a limit, Purity that excludes temptation, Life undimmed by time's shadow. It is the crowning blasphemy to implicate God with sin. As John Howe says: "He could not be the cause of unholiness but by ceasing to be holy."

2. Sin is not *for* God. "*Against* Thee."

Sin is contradiction, not *misinformation*. Not merely lack of knowledge, but, as we see every day,

it is committed in defiance of knowledge, the act of sheer wilfulness. It is a deliberate assertion of ourselves as against the supreme law which we perfectly understand.

Sin is contradiction, not *misdirection*. We do not so much miss the mark—we refuse to aim at it. It is not that we take a false direction which is in somewise a variant of the true; we prefer one that leads right *away* from the divine goal. "And they have turned unto Me the back, and not the face."

Sin is contradiction, not *imperfection*. The child is imperfect in relation to the man, the pupil in relation to the master; but the sinner is not after this fashion an imperfect saint. He is not on the same lines of development at all. He occupies an opposite pole, not a lower stage. Sin is not the failure of one striving upward, it is the denial of the heavenly vision.

Sin is contradiction, not *contrast*. Contrasts are not contradictions. "Contrasts," says Martensen, "are necessary differences which emerge from the essence of the thing, and which mutually demand one another; but contradiction is that which is repungant to the essence of the thing." Vice is not a necessary difference which emerges from the essence of righteousness; it is repugnant to that essence. It is opposition, not differentiation.

Sin is contradiction, not *privation*. It is not merely the absence of something, as darkness is the absence of light; it is also the presence of something, the positive assertion of the individual will against the commandments of God. This will is the centre of personality, and its decisions are of the essence of actuality.

If there is anything real in our life, it is when we call upon ourselves to resist or to obey the eternal law.

"The carnal mind is enmity against God." Sin is rebellion against God's majesty. It is full of terrible independence and ambition. It is the impeachment of the divine wisdom. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men," but the sinner does not think so: he thinks the foolishness of man is wiser than God. Whenever we sin, our inward thought is that our programme is more rational than His. It is the denial of the divine goodness. He who transgresses the law believes that more good is gained by breaking than keeping it: he denies the goodness of the law and the love of the Lawgiver. It is unbelief in the divine truth and justice. The transgressor secretly believes that he shall eat and not die. Sin is the real, irreconcilable antithesis. A "double-faced unity"! Between the two faces a wide gulf is fixed, and a wide gulf ever yawns between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. Heaven and hell express the "double-faced unity"; good and evil never come nearer together than that, whatever gossamer bridge speculation may spin between.

V

THE SORROWS OF SUPERIORITY

Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird; the birds round about are against her.—JER. xii. 9.

WHATEVER may be the exact sense of this passage, it serves to remind us that the privileged character of Israel excited the jealousy of surrounding nations, and in their faithfulness and unfaithfulness brought upon the chosen people special sorrows. The birds round about were against her because the colours of heaven streaked her feathers. Every kind of superiority excites dislike and invites attack. When Solomon bestowed gifts upon the birds, the hoopoes received golden crowns and flew away well satisfied with the distinction. But the jealousy of their brethren and the cupidity of man were so excited at the sight, that the hoopoes went in constant fear of their lives, and in time returned to their would-be benefactor and prayed him to take away from them the possession which had become so dangerous. The king listened to their supplication, deprived them of the glittering crowns with which he had adorned them, gave them instead crests of buff feathers tipped with black, and so sent them away

rejoicing. This fable is a parable of the exasperating quality of excellence in all departments. An extra splash of gold or purple on our wings awakens the enmity of the commonplace. Victor Hugo hits the nail on the head: "Truly, all success in this world is a crime, and must be expiated." Schopenhauer reminds us that we must not expect to make ourselves popular in society by exhibiting intelligence and discernment, for with the majority such qualities excite hatred and resentment. To show your intelligence and discernment is only an indirect way of reproaching others for being dull and incapable. Intellectual ability is felt as a piece of impertinence. A man may be as humble as possible in his demeanour, and yet hardly ever get others to overlook his crime in standing intellectually above them. As Dr. Johnson testifies: "There is nothing by which a man exasperates most people more than by displaying a superior ability of brilliancy of conversation." To be accepted by the stupid you must conceal the Argus eyes and scarlet feather. The birds round about do not take kindly to the speckled bird of genius.

This antipathy is most pronounced in relation to moral and spiritual excellence. The world loves its own, and is shy of heavenly characters not well comprehended. Joseph is an outstanding illustration of this. It was not so much the coat of many colours that rendered him a speckled bird hated of his brethren, as the pure and lovely moral qualities of which the variegated tunic was a sign. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a fountain; his branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved

him and shot at him and persecuted him." Thousands to-day are conscious of this isolation, and find it hard to bear. An old writer wittily observes: "Let those who would be singular be very virtuous." Many are thus nobly singular, and those about them resent it. Sometimes in the home circle fine character excites dislike, and the household is ready with taunt and persecution. In business, decided Christian lives may provoke unfriendliness and embitter the days of clerk, assistant, or workman. And in public affairs serious goodness is apt to irritate the community, and the singularity of uncompromising truth and purity is denounced. If genius offends, grace much more offends; if brilliance of intellect arouses resentment, pure goodness not rarely evokes positive malignity. This enforced solitariness of life is not easy to bear, and it brings special temptation and peril. Whatever we may be to the world, let us not be a speckled bird against God, as Israel came to be. Find the grace which enables the bird of purity to defy the birds of prey. Seek His fellowship and strength who trod the winepress alone. He knew best what such loveliness meant.

Single, yet undismayed, I am;
I dare believe in Jesu's name.

VI

THE DIVINE SOURCE OF REDEMPTION

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.—1 Tim. i. 15.

"CHRIST JESUS came into the world." The salvation of man—that is, his deliverance from the debasing element, the destroying element—is from above; it is directly divine and supernatural. Christ came into this world, descended from a higher sphere, that He might renew this.

Man cannot save himself. God never does anything for us that we can do for ourselves. He never gave a system of philosophy. The universe is before us, and we are left to our intelligence to frame a reasonable explanation of it. He never gave us a system of government. We were left to discern by reflection and experience the laws which determine human welfare. He never gave us a system of science. We were left to puzzle out for ourselves the problems of nature. What we are capable of doing God leaves us to do, although we may serve a long apprenticeship of thought and suffering before we attain the necessary proficiency. But we could not save ourselves, and

therefore God has stepped in to deliver us by a mighty act of extraordinary grace. He has acted in the moral kingdom as He does not in the intellectual and social development of the race, the reason being that we have a natural power adequate to the situation, but not a moral power. The Incarnation was the stoop of God to do for mankind what it could not do for itself.

There is no power of redemption within the race. Men prate about doing without God, yet they cannot lift themselves out of the mud without Him. In the street we see an acrobat stand upright, another instantly leaps upon his shoulders, another on his, perhaps a fourth mounts higher still on the human ladder, and one might think that they meant to scale the heavens; but this kind of thing comes to an end long before they touch the morning star. Some think that a similar trick may be tried in another sphere, and accomplish the elevation of the race. The schoolmaster is to mount the sturdy shoulders of the tradesman, the politician is to support himself on both, the scientist is to carry upward the imposing column, and lastly the æsthete must crown it with his light, graceful figure, and together they will raise society into the seventh heaven of perfection. But these admirable combinations go no farther in the moral world than they do in physics. If society is to be lifted to high levels, it will be by a hand out of heaven.

There is no law of salvation operative in the world. God does not do that in one way which He has already done in another. Many think there is a law of healing in the world—silently, slowly, but really curing the maladies which afflict us; a law of uplifting—silently,

slowly, but irresistibly exalting the race to the stars. If this were the case, if God had already implanted a law of salvation in the world, He would not do over again what He had already done in creation. The fact that Christ came into the world proves that there is no natural redemption.

Whenever men are saved it is by the intervention of superior strength and goodness. It is so with the individual sinner. He is helpless, often painfully helpless, until directed, encouraged, and assisted by noble friends. They take him in hand, instruct him, smooth his way, until he recovers himself. "The impotent man answered Jesus, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool." Picture of the impotent sinner in all generations! It is the same with the debased classes: if they are saved, help must come from without. Left to themselves, to the policeman, the pawnbroker, and the publican, they would rot from year to year. Only as men and women of superior education and character come to the rescue is there any hope for them. To the East End of London Oxford sends its culture, South Kensington its pictures, the West End its music, Westminster its politicians, all Churches their messengers and charities. There is hope for the lapsed classes only as the wise, the rich, the kind, and the godly come to their aid.

It is the same with fallen nations—they never raise themselves. A writer of distinction says: "The civilization of America once lost was never recovered till help came from without, in the shape of European intercourse and colonization. To be isolated is plainly

to lose the power of recovery, and the longer the isolation the more profound will be the decay." The higher nations must save the lapsed nations.

It is the same with the race—it can no more lift itself out of the slime than a person, class, or nation can. The salvation of humanity depended upon a superior Power coming to its rescue and working out its redemption. "Christ Jesus came into the world." How did life originate upon this planet? The grass, trees, flowers, birds, animals, whence came they? What was the origin of the first mysterious seeds which held within themselves these various forms of life and beauty? Lord Kelvin believes that meteoric stones are seed-bearing agents, and that it is not improbable that these aerolites first brought to us the seeds of vitality and loveliness from distant worlds. It may be so. The law of the cosmos may be that living worlds vitalize dead worlds. So the Son of God descended from the celestial universe that He might bring into this realm of death and despair all those glorious truths, influences, and hopes which are making the desolate sphere to blossom as the rose and to shake like Lebanon.

VII

PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE

And I sat where they sat.—Ezek. iii. 15.

IN the first instance Ezekiel was withdrawn from the multitude. He reports, "The Spirit took me away": removed him to the river Chebar, where in his solitude he had visions of God. But he could not be permitted to remain thus isolated. He must forsake the solitude of the cell, and mix with the throng of the captives. It was essential to the success of his ministry. Unless he did this, all the visions of his solitude were in vain. Is not, then, the great truth most graphically taught here, that if we are to help men we must in some sense associate ourselves with them, identify ourselves with them? Science emphatically denies what is known as "action at a distance." That one body may act upon another at a distance, through a vacuum, without the mediation of anything else, scientists declare to be an absurdity. A thing cannot act where it is not. That one body should operate upon and affect another body without mutual contact is inconceivable. But if this principle of distant action is impossible in the material universe, it is even less so in the spiritual realm. One soul can move another only by mutual contact.

Only as we enter into personal relations with men do we realize their sin and misery. "Then I came to them of the captivity, . . . and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days." During that week was he realizing the greatness of the sin and misery of the people? Was it this that filled him with astonishment? Henry Drummond, after close contact with inquirers, writes: "Such tales of woe did I hear that I felt I must go and change my very clothes after the contact. Oh, I am sick with the sins of men! How can God bear it?" Only in hospital wards does the student attain any adequate knowledge of disease; and only whilst dealing immediately with fallen and suffering men and women can we realize the actuality and awfulness of human iniquity and wretchedness.

Only as we mingle with the sinful and the sad do we sympathize with them. "I went in bitterness, in the glow of my spirit." Ezekiel came to the captives boiling with wrath because of their idolatries; but as he "sat where they sat," did not sympathy with the sinners mingle with his horror of their sin? The glow of pity and love was kindled as well as the glow of indignation. We cannot bless men unless we love them, unless from our heart we commiserate them; and this is possible only when through actual contact we really know their misfortunes, disabilities, temptations, and sufferings.

Only as we become one with sinning men and classes do we understand how to help and save them. "And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me." Then and there

did Ezekiel understand his mission, receive his message, and begin his ministry. Only then was he fit, only then was he competent.

"I sat where they sat." Is not this the philosophy of the Incarnation? In Hades, says Homer, except the shades first drink blood they can neither speak nor recognize the living. And it was only as the Son of God descended from the heavenly sphere and became the Son of Man, that it was possible for Him to work out our redemption, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto his brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high-priest." And all great helpers of the race have, in a very real sense, followed this supreme example, and sat with the prisoner and the slave, the drunkard and the harlot, the poor and the needy, the sick and the dying.

The reformer must keep this lesson in mind. He will never comprehend the people through an opera-glass, or succour them from a balloon. The philanthropist also must observe this law: action at a distance leaves him uninformed, misinformed, and minus the genuine enthusiasm of humanity. The educationalist must not forget this principle. A little child is a big mystery, and only they who seat themselves on the lowly bench enter into the children's hearts and needs, and they alone are competent to teach, guide, and bless. The preacher above all must come very near to those whom he would serve. "I have learned more," said Bishop Christopher Wordsworth, "in sick-rooms, and

from poor and simple folk, than from all the books which I have read." So much preaching is sounding brass and a tinking cymbal because it lacks human sympathy. "One form of preparation for the pulpit would add immeasurably to its power. That is the training gained by a more intimate acquaintance with life. If the preacher only knew, it is precisely in visitation, in close contact with souls, that he would find the best possible material for his work. This is the hunting ground of all the great masters of emotion." This witness is true. The true orator is said to enter at his opponent's door and to bring him out at his; he first meets him on common ground, and then persuades him to his own conclusions: so if we would bring men out at the door of heaven, we must begin by sitting where they sit, by being one with them in those touches of nature which make the whole world kin.

VIII

THE CHARMED LIFE OF THE FRAIL

When I am weak, then am I strong.—2 Cor. xii. 10.

ALL naturalists are impressed by the tenaciousness, immunity, and successfulness of frail creatures and things. That which at first sight seems to have little if any chance of survival in the mighty elemental war mysteriously lives and prevails. Sir J. W. Dawson again and again refers to this striking phenomenon. "Mountains become ephemeral things in comparison with the delicate herbage which covers them, and seas are in their present extent but of yesterday when compared with the minute and feeble organisms that creep on their sands or swim in their waters." "A superficial observer might think the fern or the moss of a granite hill a frail and temporary thing as compared with solid and apparently everlasting rock. But just the reverse is the case. The plant is usually older than the mountain." Darwin was similarly impressed by the security and triumph of frail things. Writing of a sea-weed which he saw on the shores of South America, he proceeds: "I know few things more surprising than to see this plant growing and flourishing amidst those great breakers of the western ocean, which no mass of rock, let it be ever so hard, can long resist." Bending to the current without breaking, they withstand impetuous tides which would

uproot the largest trees, and roaring seas which the rock itself cannot resist. And on the same coast the great naturalist wondered at the clouds of frail butterflies which passed his ship far out at sea; just as a more recent traveller marvelled to find the same winged beauties fluttering with impunity on bleak, wind-swept mountain heights of nearly eighteen thousand feet.

Kay Robinson shares in the astonishment of these distinguished observers. "It is a curious thing that the extremes of heat and cold seem to be most easily endured by the flimsiest creatures. What is it that, when the frost is splitting our strongest metal water-pipes, protects the tiny tubes of life-giving moisture in the almost spectral organism of a gnat? Larger things get frost-bitten and perish. In tropical countries the tiniest insects brave the blistering midday heat which shrivels the larger herbage, and drives men, birds, and animals gasping under shelter. In India a small blue butterfly flits all day about the parched grass or sits in full blaze of the sun, where metal or stone becomes so hot that it burns the hand. What heat-resisting secret resides in the minute body of that little butterfly, scarcely thicker than notepaper? Nature's power of preserving life touches the miraculous."

The saints have the least reason to be afraid when they most feelingly recognize their utter weakness and dependence. He who puts into the most delicate forms of animal and vegetable life such secrets of resistance or evasion, fortifies the heart of His feeblest children with sublime increments of vitality and victory. Does sickness or misfortune reduce us to insignificance?

Precious are the privileges of insignificance, as we may see everywhere in the lowly forms of nature. "More surely than the eagle escapes the arrow, the animalcule escapes being crushed." Do the bitter blows of life destroy our confidence in our own understanding and sufficiency, and leave us nothing but to wait and trust? Sings the old poet, "Love's passives are his activ'st part"; and truly the soul is never more magnificently strong and safe than when tribulation, shutting it up to simple love and trust, causes it to behave itself like a weaned child.

In submission, contentment, gentleness, humility, and patience the sovereign energy of love asserts itself as rarely in action. The active and passive virtues are two sides of one shield, but the deep significance of our Lord's life is that the passive graces constitute the golden side. Gentleness, long-suffering, and endurance are of the essence of the divinely great and heroic. Do the sorrows and severities of life feelingly persuade us of our frailty, and bow us to the earth? We prevail by yielding, we succumb to conquer, like those sea-flowers which continue to bloom amid the surf when the rocks are pounded. In acquiescence and diffidence, in yieldingness and clinging, do we triumph, as the fern survives geological cataclysms and the butterfly the blizzard.

In celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles the Jews are required to make their booths sufficiently frail that the stars may be seen through them: thus through the rents of the body and the dislocations of circumstance are we kept face to face with the claims and hopes of a higher world, and the fragile booth in which we

painfully dwell is a safer refuge than the walls of iron and gates of brass of a carnal security. The humbled, bruised soul is far from conceits and presumption. There is a temper of bravado, a jingoism of life, of which we may well stand in fear; but the habitual sense of our own nothingness before God, and of our entire dependence on His grace, is a state of salvation, a presage of full and final victory.

IX

THE DILEMMAS OF DUTY

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant; when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace.—2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

IN the main the path of duty is sufficiently clear, but not always. Baffling situations arise, and it is difficult to determine what is right and best. And the more sterling the character, the more likely are these delicate questions to arise. The majority are not troubled about bowing in the house of Rimmon because they grovel before the idol; but there is a bewildering zone to every sensitive soul, a twilight region of conflicting duties. The subject is by no means academical. A complex civilization tends to multiply ambiguous situations, and we could easily compile a considerable list of the singular positions in which godly men find themselves, and of the curiosities of compromise into which they enter. Dean Farrar remarks on this passage: "The only rule which sincere Christians can follow is to have no truce with Canaan, no halting between two opinions, no tampering, no compliance, no connivance, no complicity with evil—

even no tolerance of evil as far as their own conduct is concerned. No good man, in the light of the gospel dispensation, could condone himself in seeming to sanction—still less in doing—anything which in his opinion ought not to be done, or in saying anything which implied his own acquiescence in things which he knows to be evil."

But these excellent commonplaces do not help us. The fact remains that various evils are subtly interwoven with the very fabric of society, and the most delicate situations and problems of duty arise. Life is charmingly simple when we dwell in a cottage in a vast wilderness; but let us make the immense initial compromise of entering into society and its manifold relations, and a train of compromises is inevitable—compromises which often impinge on morals and religion. In medical, legal, military, political, and commercial life, righteous men find themselves in positions in which, to say the least, they are uncomfortable, and where they are required to act in a way that goes against the grain. In this sadly disordered world pious men are confronted by problems of conduct apparently as insoluble as the squaring of the circle. They can cut the knot by getting out of the world; but if they are to abide in their calling, they are entangled by associations which in certain particulars conflict with their faith and feeling.

On the whole, Elisha thought it best for Naaman to continue with his Syrian master. "Go in peace." Farrar thinks that Elijah would have refused this sanction, but there is no reason for this supposition. St. Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (viii.

1-13) agrees with Elisha. "We know that an idol is nothing in the world." The process of reasoning by which the apostle justified the Christians who ate meat offered to idols would excuse Naaman bowing in the house of Rimmon and justify the judgment of the prophet. *On the whole, taking all their circumstances into consideration,* it is sometimes better that godly men should suffer certain social compromises than that they should violently and abruptly sever themselves from the familiar circle of life and duty. We say, "suffer" certain social compromises, for if they desired or welcomed them the whole case would be changed.

In dealing with a dilemma of duty let us not forget the extreme seriousness of any kind of concession to unrighteousness or ungodliness. Even when for the sake of "the present distress" we permit the compromise, our feet stand in slippery places. Charles Reade justly discriminates on this delicate matter: "Mr. Eden's anxiety to be back among his prisoners increased daily, but his nurses would not hear of it. They acted in concert, and stuck at nothing to cure their patient. They assured him all was going well in the prison. They meant well; but for all that, every lie, great or small, is the brink of a precipice the depths of which nothing but Omniscience can fathom." Christian men will not lie, yet that reserve and finesse which the situation demands incline to the same brink of peril, and so do most other compromises.

Remembering the inevitableness of compromise, let us be comforted in the fact that perfect sincerity on our part implies a rare gift of discrimination. "There

are instincts for all crises," and no doubt, entirely truthful souls possess wonderful intuitions of leading. The single eye ensures a body full of light. Everything, however, must not be trusted to mystic insight and impulse; a cultivated judgment ought to accompany entire sincerity. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Survey the whole situation, weigh conflicting claims in delicate balances, exercise a practical judgment on particularly perplexing questions, and the Spirit of God will not permit us greatly to err. Having come to a thoughtful and prayerful conclusion, for the rest "think noble thoughts of God," who will render you immune in half-lawful places, and in His good time and wonderful working lead you out of them. It may be that we suffer these painful compromises in the interest of larger and higher issues, as Naaman's continuance with the Syrian gave the true religion a standing in an idolatrous court: the tares were spared in the interest of the wheat. Our spirit and action, too, in ambiguous situations may furnish more impressive evidences of our integrity than sharp, definite paths of duty can evoke. And the zone of dubiety and suspense implies precious discipline. Make the Divine Spirit your counsellor, and He shall guide into the whole truth.

X

THE TYRANNY OF TIME

In your patience ye shall win your souls.—LUKE xxi. 19.

IT is easy to become impatient in regard to the development of our own character. Whilst sincerely and earnestly striving to outlive our faults, and attain a worthier life, we are sometimes almost heartbroken by the absence of any striking signs of progress. Yet it is unreasonable to lose hope and courage. The growth of any seeker after a high ideal will seem slow to the enthusiastic mind, and when we aim at a lofty moral ideal we must specially remember the stubbornness of constitutional faults to which heredity has perhaps given the sanction of centuries. Our improvement may be real whilst it is imperceptible. An artist recently took at short intervals a hundred photographs marking the various stages of a rapidly growing plant. Now, it would require a fine eye to distinguish progress in the successive pictures of the long series: so imperceptible would be the changes of the plant, that any two closely following plates would be indistinguishable, and progress would be evident only when somewhat distant pictures of the series were compared. Yet personally we often lose heart by comparing our present selves with our

moral and spiritual history of yesterday. How impossible to gauge moral movement! But even when onward and upward movement is really slender, has not modern thought recognized the immense importance of even the most trifling variation? If we are living rightly, the deepest changes are being silently wrought in the depths of our nature, and the faintest of these is a cause for infinite gratitude. The plant was steadily on its way to the consummation of its glorious flower, even when the photographic film failed to register its too delicate progress; and with true men the soul grows in the power of holiness, even when crude self-examinations fail to discover the delightful transformation. No impatience will accelerate the unfolding of flower or soul, it can only retard. Nor let us be impatient with the circumstances which discipline character; God knows best how long the gold ought to remain in the furnace, how long the jewel must suffer the grinding of the wheel.

We become weary waiting for the renewal of the world. Yet the kingdom of God *is* coming, however deeply sometimes its development may be veiled. Nature moves slowly, advancing by hairs'-breadths, augmenting by the scruple. If we had lived on this earth from its very beginning until now, we should have thought it standing still, so tardy its action and minute the individual result; but if we recall the geological age when not a plant was on the earth, and then compare that barren epoch with the modern world blushing like a rainbow with ten thousand flowers, it is patent after all that the development of the planet has gone on unrestingly, however silently and deliberately.

It is the same with the history of civilization. Had we lived through the long ages since man first appeared on the earth until now we should have thought him ever standing still, so gradual and insignificant have been the successive changes and transformations of which he has been the subject; but compare the flint instruments, the rude vessels, and the grotesque decorations of a primitive kitchen midden, with the splendid treasures of an International Exhibition, and the progress is as indisputable as it is glorious. So with the spiritual development of the race; we cannot mark the steps of its onward march, but the moral barbarism of the ages by fine degrees, which escape our eye, passes into the pure splendour of the millennial world. "What is to last for ever takes a long time to grow."

We must be struck with the spirit of patience displayed everywhere in the New Testament. The patience of our Lord is remarkable. Isaiah prophesied of Him: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law." Nothing is more wonderful than the serenity of our Lord in the prosecution of His great mission. His zeal was a flaming fire, and His desire to see the travail of His soul in the establishment of His kingdom of universal righteousness and peace was intense, with an intensity into which we cannot enter; but the calmness with which He carried out His purpose was that of the measured and majestic movements of nature. Never flurried nor betrayed into the agitation of hurry, but whilst kindling with sublime and mighty enthusiasm He proceeded to fulfil His destiny without haste and without pause. The

same spirit of tranquil confidence animated the apostles. "Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Because they exulted in glorious power they were patient and long-suffering.

In these days of feverishness and haste our eye is too much on the clock. Rae, writing of *The White Sea Peninsula,* alleges that in all the hundreds of Russian peasants' huts, cottages, and houses that he visited every one had a clock, yet he saw only one going. Wise people! It is well to remember that we are children of time; but the agitation and tension of watching the clock are not good for us in any sense, least of all in relation to spiritual things. Let us do our duty, and do it with confidence. When the Duke of Wellington saw a painting of Waterloo which represented him sitting on horseback with a watch in his hand anxiously scanning the hour, the great soldier ridiculed the picture, declared the posture false, and told the artist to paint the watch out. No battle is won with a watch in our palm. The victory over our own nature, the victory that overcometh the world, are gained in patient faith and endeavour. The victory of Christ, and the setting up of His kingdom over all the earth, will be achieved, not as against time, but in quietness and confidence.

XI

SUBCONSCIOUSNESS

Their inward thought is.—Ps. xlix. 11.

YES, this is what we want to get at—our real spirit, belief, sympathy, purpose—that which lies hidden in the inmost recesses of the soul. Modern thinkers are much interested in what is known as the Philosophy of the Unconscious. They maintain that in our bodily organism distinct wills and ideas exist of which our higher consciousness is unconscious. And not only so, but distinct mental elements and processes exist which do not report themselves in the higher consciousness. Below consciousness is a dim realm of obscure ideas, reasonings, impulses, and purposes—a realm which by the great majority of men is almost entirely unsuspected. And this nebulous region is not confined to our psychic and intellectual nature, it also underlies and seriously influences moral and spiritual life. In the text the psalmist glances at this dark, inchoate deep where seethes the stuff of which character and destiny are ultimately made.

"Their inward thought." That is not the thought we express to those about us; the idea of the psalmist is that the outer life is another thing to the thought. Our talk ignores it, or sophistically misrepresents it. If ever telepathy becomes a science and thought-read-

ing a fact, they will disclose unpleasant contradictions between the inward thought and the profession. But—and this is of yet greater consequence—the inward thought is not merely undivulged, it often remains obscure and unavowed to those who cherish and obey it. The real wish and passion lie like guilty secrets in subterranean chambers rarely visited; occasionally the bull's-eye exposes for a moment the foolish, vile, or vulgar imagining hidden there; but, as a rule, our eyes are averted from that which will not bear thinking about.

Is not envy the worm in the bud? We should be ashamed to confess that the secret of our severe strictures on some we criticize is this base canker of envy: indeed, it is by no means clear to us that jealousy does discolour our judgments, when it is a fact, nevertheless. Is not ambition at the bottom of our action? We cunningly persuade ourselves that we are actuated simply by sincere motives, whilst the "inward thought" cowering in the dark corner dreams only of personal aggrandizement. Is not malice from time to time the chief factor in our hostility to our fellows? We dare not formulate to ourselves the mean motive, it is speciously disguised, yet rancour is of its essence. Is not the inner thought covetousness? A selfish, miserly soul alone explains our conduct; but we elude the truth, never once permitting expression in consciousness or speech of the sordid passion which governs us. Is not the inner thought sensual? We delicately veil the animating appetite, yet the core is rottenness. The sleight of hand and cunning craftiness by which we deceive others are clumsy trickery compared with the

deft conjuring by which we deceive ourselves. We shrink from giving expression to the "inward thought"; it is too impolitic, preposterous, disgraceful. South has a famous sermon, "On the Fatal Force of Words"; but there is also a saving force in words, and when impulses, moods, and inclinations are brought up from the underworld into the daylight and frankly interpreted, it is a great gain. We are, however, not courageous enough to define and disavow the vague thing, and so it continues to lurk with "the shadows of the caverns of man's mind."

Yet the unspoken, unrealized thought is the most potent factor in character; the real belief and motive determine and mould life. A French naturalist has recently shown that the invisible morphological characters of plants and animals are more influential in deciding the future of the species to which they belong than the visible characters are. What the microscope searches out means more to the future of the flower or creature than do its obvious characteristics. And we may truly say that the secret things of the human heart are more fateful than anything appearing on the surface. The hidden sympathies of the soul silently yet masterfully sway the whole course of life.

What is described as probably the largest meteorite known in the world, recently arrived in New York. It was brought from the coast of Greenland by Lieutenant Peary. On the cruise home the presence of this magnetic iron in the hold of the ship affected the compass, and whenever there was bad weather and the mariners had to depend on dead reckoning they could not keep their course. So the "inward thought" in

the depths of the personality imparts a bias to the mind, confuses the judgment, cajoles the conscience, paralyses the will, and makes the life to swerve from the line of godliness and righteousness. The first stage in all eccentricity of character and irregularity of life is this secret inward leaning.

Remember that God knows "the inward thought," and judges it, and us by it. "Thus saith the Lord; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." He sees us as we sit "each one in the chambers of his imagery." "He knoweth our thought afar off," in its remote, embryonic conception. Let us deal with ourselves in the secret places of fancy and desire. The wish behind the thought, the inclination behind the resolve, the unconscious intention, the secret, cherished affinities out of which all dubious actions and courses of life spring—these origins and breeding-places of character and action call for searching and candid oversight and discipline. We must carry the illuminating, purifying process right back here. "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

XII

THE DIVINE PROTESTATION

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live?—EZEK. xxviii. 23.

OUR conception of God is most influential. If we know Him as "a hard man," it means one thing; if we recognize Him as equitable and generous, it means another, and a very different thing. The one entails bondage of mind, discouragement, paralysis; the other is a precious inspiration. The whole argument of Ezekiel is designed to set forth God as just and generous; not condemning the son for the sin of his father, but dealing with each according to his own conduct, and even after he has sinned of opening a way of recovery.

1. *The constitution of the world* gives its sanction to the text. Nature does not invite us to destroy ourselves. Certainly poisonous elements may be extracted from the plants which grow about us. From the laurel we may distil prussic acid, from the gay poppy derive opium and laudanum; the juice of the hemlock is deadly; decoctions of various herbs torment and destroy; and some plants are immediately and wholly fatal. Yet this is not the prevailing character of vegetation. One of the ancient kings who took to

gardening filled his grounds with poisonous plants; but the aspect of nature does not suggest that its Creator was animated by that sinister spirit. Nature is not a devil's paradise. The commons are not covered with a venomous sward, our gardens are not planted with poison flowers, nor are the forests thick with upas-trees. If we so resolve, we can find opium and strychnine; but leagues of green grass, orchards full of odorous blossom, millions of lilies, carnations, and roses, tell only of sweetness, health, and gladness, and of the loving spirit and purpose of Him who created all these things. Nature is on the side of righteousness and life. George Sand thus addresses a correspondent: "Nature, you think, fixes the limits herself, and prevents us from indulgence in excess. Ah! but no, she is not wiser than we who are part of herself." Nature *is* wiser. We are not part of nature: if we were we should not be guilty of excess; the foolish intemperance by which we destroy ourselves has no place in nature. We possess faculties which differentiate us from nature and raise us above it, and the misuse of these faculties degrades us below the beasts which perish. If we recognize and obey the great laws of truth and beauty which are the laws of nature, we shall live and not perish. "I have no pleasure at all in the death of the sinner" is written in letters of glory on nature's front. He who inspired the Mosaic legislation—"When thou buildest a new house thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house if any man fall from thence"—first observed the humane law in the building of the world.

2. *The constitution of society* declares the divine graciousness. The mistaken reasoners in Ezekiel's day argued that the law which bound man to man, one generation to another, was a cardinal source of human misery. The fathers having eaten sour grapes, the children's teeth were set on edge. Yet it is clear enough that the social law was designed for our welfare and not our loss. A party of Alpine climbers is usually roped together, and this arrangement sometimes involves its common destruction; yet the design of the expedient is manifestly benevolent, for on the whole the mutual attachment is helpful and protective to the climbers, steadying them in dangerous moments and giving them a general sense of safety. It is much the same with the social law. The bands which bind us together may prove disastrous—the father dragging down the son, the husband the wife, the son the household, one friend another. But the obvious design of the law was the common good and salvation. Our mutual bonds—civic links of steel, friendship's jewel-beaded cords of silk, love's threads of gold—are so fashioned that we may steady and strengthen one another in scaling the difficult slopes of progress, and that we may together reach the crystal heights and blue heavens of individual and social perfection. The tender yet tenacious ties binding us into brotherhood eloquently declare that God loves us and ever contemplates our safety and delight. And Ezekiel is strong in his assurance that, whatever evils the social law may entail in this life, it is never permitted to drag souls into the abyss. "The more, the merrier," is a familiar but true description of the social law. "As I live, saith

the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the misery and damnation of men"; and the divine asseveration is gloriously borne out as we see Him setting the solitary "in solemn troops and sweet societies," that he may know the immunity and inspiration of brotherhood.

3. *The constitution of our own nature* demonstrates the beningnity of the divine purpose. The fundamental and essential instincts, faculties, and forces of our nature are on the side of righteousness and life: our reason is, our conscience and nobler affections are. Danger there is, and ever must be, where freedom is; but everything consonant with liberty has been done to safeguard us. The miner must descend the shaft, and work where the insidious fire-damp may reach him; yet science provides him with a safety-lamp, and before entering the pit legislation locks the lamp lest unwittingly he should expose himself to peril. If, then, the collier carries a private key and unlocks the lamp to light his pipe, perishing miserably in an awful explosion, the fault is altogether his own. Is not this a parable of our human nature and situation? What is the conscience but the candle of the Lord declaring the perilous thing, place, or hour? And what are reason and the nobler instincts but safeguards of the divine light? We must do violence to ourselves, as a rule immense and repeated violence, before we destroy ourselves. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." It is writ large over all our structure and spirit that God willeth not the death of a sinner.

4. *The graciousness of divine providence* furnishes impressive proof of the saving design. In *Catherine Furze* occurs this passage: "Destiny delights in offer-

ing to the wicked chances of damning themselves." If by "destiny" is meant nature, providence, or God, nothing can be more untrue. The fact is the direct opposite. We can find abundant opportunities to ruin ourselves if we are intent upon doing so; but we must seek or make opportunity, it is not thrust upon us. To charge nature or life with delighting in offering to us chances of damning ourselves is as incorrect as to affirm that London Bridge delights in offering to passengers the chance of drowning themselves. If drunk or mad, they may drown themselves; but they must leave the path and climb the parapet: it is palpable that the thoroughfare was constructed for convenience and safety, and not to solicit suicide. Human life is not arranged on the principle of giving us plenty of opportunities to damn ourselves. It is surprising how rare temptation is whilst we live a normal life, intent only on work and duty. "Lead us not into temptation." Graciously and wonderfully is that prayer answered, and the poor helpless creature hidden from the dread occasion.

5. *The whole system of revelation and redemption* is the final and overwhelming proof of the divine grace. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." The Cross of Christ is the embodied oath of the Almighty, and it ought to banish unbelief and fear from every guilty breast.

XIII

SPECIOUS SIN

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.—Prov. xiv. 12.

A WAY seemingly straight, but really fatal"; "the beginning of the way is straight, the end of it is death." The figure is that of a journey, in which the traveller imagines that he is pursuing a *straight* path that will lead him to his desired goal of success and happiness, but finds, too late, that it leads to ruin. The thought of the proverb is the illusive character of the godless and immoral life.

When impiety and wickedness are disguised by decorum and taste, it is easy to mistake the false path for the true. Guilty lives are worked out on very different lines. The wickedness of some is vulgar and ghastly in the extreme: no effort is made to disguise or soften it; it is bad in form as in essence; it immediately disgusts all right-thinking people. There is the less danger that such a course should be mistaken for the right one. But it is altogether different with others whose life is equally in the wrong. Whatever these may do is marked by decency, everything is in good taste, they are even dainty and elegant, their haunts and habits are invariably refined; they may

forget God and His law, but they never forget that they are gentlemen. Yet the result is identical; the two courses, so superficially unlike, are inevitably and similarly disastrous. Whether worked out with refinement, or flaunted in ways impudent and offensive—selfishness, licentiousness, or worldliness equally destroys the soul. In tropical forests trees grow whose branches are infested with parasitic growths, some of which blossom into gorgeous flowers, whilst others develop loathsome fungi and cankers; yet, flowers or cankers, both live upon the vitality of the tree and equally destroy it.

So there are transgressors whose mode of life is exempt from all grossness—sometimes, indeed, their manners are even brilliant and fascinating; whilst the excesses of others are wholly coarse and brutal: but, æsthetic or revolting, unrighteousness is equally fatal to character and destiny. Society is little ruffled by the polite or brilliant wickedness which matches the mistletoe or orchid, whilst it indignantly resents conduct suggestive of the sickly fungi; but He who knows all the secret working of disobedience on the mind and character of the transgressor realizes full well that sin, whether decorous or vulgar, is in essence one, and that the common issue is death. The couch of impurity is not less leprous because of its spices; the virus of malice is not attenuated when it distils from the lips like honey; a lie loses nothing of its malign quality when uttered in dainty speech or written on scented paper; selfishness mindful of ceremony blights as when brutally frank; the grace of the thief does not redeem the infamy of his dishonesty; and intemperance veiled

with discretions kills as certainly as the excess of the gutter. Sin loses nothing of its virulence by losing its grossness.

When truth and righteousness are cunningly blended with error and vice we may easily be deceived. In a goldsmith's window in one of our cities may be read this notice, "Artificial gems set in real gold." This advertisement expresses one of the most serious perils of human life—the close and confusing association of truth and error, good and evil, godliness and hypocrisy. To deal with what is wholly erroneous and evil requires little discernment, and involves less peril; but false gems set in pure gold are the masterpieces of temptation. Bad doctrine vindicated in real eloquence; immoral principles disguised in splendid poetry; licentious life glorified in masterly fiction; selfishness enforced by philosophical maxims; equivocal courses sanctioned by brilliant names; sensual pleasures gilded by æsthetic refinements; ungodliness linked with love and friendship; and base policy justified by Scripture—these, with similar admixtures and associations, are among the subtlest perils of life, and they especially abound in modern life. It is exactly here, where evil is mixed with good, and where it is thus made to wear innocent and seductive aspects, that the soul stands in special jeopardy. During the past year or two there has been an extraordinary crop of Alpine accidents, and in several instances these arose from a disregard of the dangers of a grass slope. The inexperienced mountaineer thinks that a grass slope must be safe, and, setting his foot on the inviting green, discovers that it

is every bit as dangerous as the ice, if it be steep and terminate in a precipice. The short Alpine grass is remarkably slippery, and many a tourist who has safely negotiated rock and glacier has fallen a victim to the treacherous slope where the verdant patch and mountain flower tempt the climber. We are comparatively safe when a thing is nakedly evil and a situation confessedly dangerous; but the pure gold reconciles us to the spurious gem, and the green slope, with an edelweiss at the top and a precipice at the bottom, lures us to our doom.

We may easily be deceived by the glamour with which evil is frequently invested. Imagination, passion, fashion, often wonderfully transform and glorify forbidden things. In South America and elsewhere are mountain ranges distinguished by extraordinary colouring. If an immense quantity of scarlet, vermilion, and yellow ochre paint were made to gush over the rocks, it could not produce a more brilliant depth of colouring than nature has spontaneously created. They are known as "The Painted Rocks," because they are decorated by reds, purples, greens, and yellows in marvellous mixtures. But these mountains have nothing except their brilliant colouration. Scarcely a lichen or moss grows on their surface, and the precious metals are never found in them. This curious aspect of nature is exactly representative of many of the evil things, places, and practices which abound in human society and life; they are seductive to the imagination, whilst utterly worthless and disappointing. Carmel with its flowers, Lebanon with its cedars, or Hermon with its snows, is gloomy and

disappointing compared with the gaudy hues of the glowing slopes up which the devil lures his victims. "The dark mountains" of obvious and cruel evil are less dangerous than these mounts of satanic transfiguration.

We shall be led into the right path if we are perfectly sincere and serious, vigilant and willing to make every sacrifice that truth may require at our hands. The Spirit of God waits to teach, guide, and save us—to give us real gems set in pure gold, to bring us into green pastures which have no precipices. Are we willing to follow the royal path?

XIV

THE FORLORN RESCUE

Scarcely saved.—1 PETER iv. 18.

MARK RUTHERFORD, in one of his books, indulges in this just reflection: "Do not those of us who have been mercifully prevented from damning ourselves before the whole world, who have succeeded and triumphed—do we not know, know as we hardly know anything else, that our success and our triumph were due to superiority in strength by just a grain, no more, of our better self over the raging rebellion beneath it? It was just a tremble of the tongue of the balance; it might have gone this way, or it might have gone the other, but by God's grace is was this way settled—God's grace, as surely, in some form of words, everybody must acknowledge it to have been." He who does not feel the truth of this reflection cannot have marked very carefully his experience, and he is one who stands in special peril. The righteous are vividly conscious of the fact that more than once they escaped by a hair's breadth. Such are the weakness and folly of human nature that our salvation is rendered possible only in the infinite power and grace of God.

The evolutionist knows that in the great struggle

of nature competitive forms are so evenly balanced against each other that the slightest advantage determines the successful plant or animal. Darwin's words are these: "A grain in the balance may determine which individuals shall live and which shall die; which variety or species shall increase in number, and which shall decrease or finally become extinct." "A grain in the balance." Very astonishing is the vast part that the grain plays in deciding the mighty fortunes of nature. It has been said somewhat reproachfully that the modern mind is "drunk with the microscope"; but careful experiment shows that he who does not know the little does not know the much, that "man's biggest organs are his atoms," and that in nature generally the minute is almighty: "the retired sphere of leasts" turns out the sovereign sphere. The presence or absence of the grain in the balance is equally decisive in society. That which determines between the successful and the unsuccessful, the rich and the poor, the famous and the forgotten, is often singularly insignificant—a mere particle. So the moral triumph of man repeatedly seems due to superiority in strength by just a degree, only that. "Scarcely saved." The saint of fairest reputation is humble, knowing how nearly he escaped failure; he is full of charity for the fallen, because he feelingly remembers how his own feet were almost gone and his steps had wellnigh slipped.

The special lesson we would now enforce is the immense importance of any gain whatever in the religious life. Many Christian people do not appreciate this fact, and accordingly despise the minute accessions of light and strength secured by daily

study, vigilance, and effort. Because our increase in knowledge and energy is so slight as to be imperceptible, we neglect the opportunities which promise so little. If we received sudden and splendid bursts of light, if our character blazed out in memorable transfigurations, if our work straightway bore a hundredfold, we should be satisfied; but the atomic increment, the slight happy variation in our experience, and added grain or cell of life and force, are lightly esteemed. It is a mistake. The minute gain of daily faithfulness is in its significance immense. The naturalist tells us that some flowers are curiously sensitive to a single degree of cold more or less; let the thermometer drop just half a degree too much, and the glories shrivel up black and dead as though they had passed through a furnace. The fatal "half-degree" is the thing to escape or withstand. What havoc will the half-degree of intensified trouble and temptation work in the experience of the weak! On the contrary, how blessed are those who, a little stronger, can successfully defy heightened trial! Truth, a trifle more clearly discerned; faith, enhanced as by a grain of mustard seed; love, clinging by an added tendril; and hope, the anchor of the soul, somewhat more surely biting the solid ground, mean much in the history of a soul.

Let us take to heart the fact that the working out of our salvation is a serious thing, attended by infinite difficulty. We are familiar with peril in our natural life. The fury and lightning of the storm, the dangers of the sea, the chances of war, the perils of the mine, the risks of locomotion, the snares of machinery, the threatenings of fire, violence and epidemic, with many

other sources and agents of destruction, beset our path, and only by constant circumspection do we escape, if we escape at all. There is far more tension of awareness in our natural life than at first appears. Yet the peril of the soul is certainly not less; and the best are conscious that they have nothing of which to boast. Whilst we believe we are compelled to plead, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." The dread occasion of temptation leaves us humbled by the knowledge that we were saved yet so as by fire. The recurrent sense of personal frailty feelingly reminds us of the jeopardy in which we walk. The stress of trial, sorrow, and mystery perpetually extorts the cry, "Save, Lord, or we perish." A commentator is well within the truth who declares: "That any single believer comes off at last victorious against so great apparent odds is to be accounted for only on the principle that what with men is impossible is possible with God." The most thrilling rescues of fire-ladder or lifeboat are dull metaphors of the wonderful deliverances of the soul from sin and hell. Heaven must have held its breath several times over the best of us. Let us, then, take care that henceforth we put our whole soul into the work of its own salvation: despising nothing, neglecting nothing. There is no telling in our spiritual life with what vast consequences microscopic gains are fraught, or what tragedies the lack of those gains may entail. The atom becomes a spiritual rock which guarantees our salvation; the grain turns in our favour the balances of eternity.

> Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
> And the little less, and what worlds away!

XV.

SECULAR WEAPONS IN THE SPIRITUAL WAR

Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong.—JOEL iii. 10.

WE are always disposed to think that whatever is wonderful, delightful, or specially efficient is a long way off and very hard of attainment, when all the time it is not improbably close to us, a familiar association. Last summer several fatal accidents were reported from the Alps occasioned by the gathering of edelweiss. People suppose that it is a rare and valuable plant flourishing only in inaccessible places, and near to the snow-line; whereas naturalists assure us that it is one of the easiest raised plants that exist: it can be readily grown in a London back garden, a penny packet of seed constituting the whole of the necessary outfit. So the mountain flower is stripped of romance; or, to speak more accurately, the glamour of the Swiss hills is transferred to a London back garden. The greatest possibilities are close at hand, latent in things familiar and commonplace, or working unsuspectedly in the ordinary incidents and experience of everyday life. Our text suggests an illustration of this. In the plowshare and

pruning-hook are potential weapons of victory, and in the simple rustic a hero. What we now wish to note is the marvellous power of salvation that dwells in common things and duties.

When we consider the methods by which we are, or may be, defended from temptation, we think chiefly of a mystic armour of light, of a supernatural hedge planted about us, of celestial horses of fire and chariots of fire; and we are apt to forget to what a large extent the grace of God acts through familiar things and relations, and that, duly sanctified, the weapons of moral victory are the commonplace tools already in our hands. Sir Oliver Lodge recently wrote thus: "It may surely without unorthodoxy be held that there are two ways of overcoming sin and sinful tendencies—one the direct way, of concentrating attention on them by brooding and lamentation; the other, the indirect and, as I think, the safer and more efficacious and altogether more profitable way of putting in so many hours' work per day, and of excluding weeds from the garden by energetic cultivation of healthy plants." We may not neglect the sighings of a contrite heart, or ignore the supernatural grace which strengthens penitent men; but we need to remember also the indirect defence and blessing of daily sanctified human duty. Do not envy or expect the ordnance of Milton's war in heaven; plowshares supply enchanted blades, pruning-hooks, ethereal spears, and the magic panoply in which the good fight is best waged is the unadorned but consecrated paraphernalia of ordinary human life.

What a source of moral salvation is the *home!* That

our house is our "castle" is a familiar boast; yet it is far more of a castle than we sometimes think. Home life properly hallowed is a citadel of the soul, a magazine of martial resources against the spiritual war. It is a mainstay of Mansoul amid beleaguering hosts of darkness. Drinking at its pure fountain, we lose our taste for stolen waters. Its simplicity and purity are charms against a garish world. Its exquisite relationships call forth the noblest qualities of the soul. Its unity is strength for good. Its joys and sorrows impart a brightness and tenderness which are a glory to our nature, and upon the glory a defence. Whenever we think of "the whole armour of God," let us remember that the domestic institution is a very considerable and precious piece of it. The home is a royal fortress. The hearthstone a rampart. The fender a brazen wall. Its pots and pans, helmets and greaves of brass. Its decorations, the sheen of polished arrows. Its utilities, bows and slings and coats of mail. "They hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have made thy beauty perfect." Who can justly estimate the moral efficacy of the home altar, of its round table, of its little library, of its sacred grave! Without war-paint, and with the very least of the pomp and circumstance of glorious war, the weakest amongst us in the consecrated domestic armoury may boast, "I am strong."

What a safeguard is *work!* The tendency of legitimate business, pursued in the right spirit, is to foster what is best in our heart and life. To a certain extent work is good because it occupies the time and engages the mind. All the world is alive to that terrible peril

of mischief which besets the vacant mind and empty hands. One of the current reviews writing on "The City of Enchantments," proceeds: "In Naples and its enchanting environs, the softness of the climate and the richness of the soil have been the curses of an indolent and superstitious people. . . . The women do the work; the men loaf about their orange-gardens, lounge over their nets, or sleep away the hours of the sunshine. . . . It is a melancholy look-out, and the dry rot of inveterate indolence seems inherent in the race."

Moreover, work is good, not merely because it occupies time, but also as it tends to secure the sanity and health of the soul. It keeps us in touch with reality, and thus excludes the subjectivity and sentimentality which constitute the medium of temptation; it brings with it a sense of obligation and restraint which is always salutary; and in manifold ways occupation is a discipline and tonic to the whole being. The unhealthiest trade is less dangerous than no task at all. Dr. Stiles, an eminent scientist of the United States Agricultural Department, claims to have discovered "the germ of laziness," which he declares is chiefly responsible for the abnormal laziness existing among the poor white people in some of the Southern States. Alas! this malady has spread far beyond the poor whites of the Southern States; its victims abound everywhere, and truly deplorable are its consequences. "The germ of laziness" is one of the very worst of the species; it generates endless mischief, it is at the root of many of the mighty evils which afflict society, and the doctor will indeed prove a benefactor to humanity

if he can discover an anti-toxin for this pestilent microbe.

We are often impressed, when visiting an arsenal or military exhibition, with the display of firearms, swords, lances, and bayonets, of ominous mitrailleuse and mortar, shot and shell; whilst we forget the unrivalled power and virtue of the humble instruments of industry which are in the hands of the million. The scythe, spade, crowbar, axe and hammer, trowel, yard-stick, weights and measures, and a thousand other implements of common industry are mighty weapons of a glorious war; for with these tools of toil we rout alien armies of vice and folly. Work is apt to be a rough friend; yet we have no truer friend, nor one more really helpful. Working clothes worthily worn are as heroic as khaki, and the daily victories won in shirt sleeves are not less significant than those of warriors with garments rolled in blood. If we would be safe from the assaults of evil, we must sanctify and improve the common relations, duties, and diversions of life, and we shall forge out of them shield and helmet, sword and breastplate. The ninth verse of this chapter gives a rousing summons: "Prepare war." The original signifies *hallow war,* that is, make it holy. Let "Holiness unto the Lord" be written on the bells of the horses, and the pots in the Lord's house be like the bowls before the altar, and we shall be safe from the fear of evil.

XVI

THE UNNATURALNESS OF MORAL SURRENDER

Moreover, thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return?—JER. viii. 4.

THAT the difficulties of return to a better life are real and formidable must be frankly owned. In losing ground spiritually and morally we place ourselves at a great disadvantage; what is easily lost is recovered painfully. Difficulties which arise both within and without are to be reckoned with.

Difficulties arise within the backsliding soul itself which are not easily overcome. As Drummond points out, "The penalty of backsliding is not something vague and arbitrary, but the consequences are already marked within the structure of the soul. The punishment of degeneration is the atrophy of the spiritual nature. It is well known that the recovery of the backslider is one of the hardest problems in spiritual work. To reinvigorate an old organ seems more difficult and hopeless than to develop a new one; and the backslider's terrible lot is to have to retrace with enfeebled feet each step of the way along which he strayed."

We must be careful how we press the analogy between physiological and spiritual degeneration, for serious physical degeneration never takes place in the lifetime of an individual, but only in a considerable series of generations; yet it is alarming to contemplate the swift degeneration of a soul, to mark how soon it loses vision, strength, sensibility, aspiration, and hope. The injury that the moral nature sustains through a lapse is to its immense prejudice; to climb steep and slippery slopes is ever sufficiently arduous, but to attempt those slopes with injured sight and shattered limbs is an exaggerated and disheartening task. The process of physical recovery is usually trying, and frequently peculiarly painful. Ordinary convalescence is full of uneasiness, the sense of weakness and suffering being most acute as the returning forces of life slowly seize successive points of the citadel so nearly lost. The restoration of those who narrowly escape drowning is accompanied by intense agony. Physical weariness and torture are repeated yet more vividly in the sorrow of fallen souls fighting towards life. "And having cried out, and torn him much, he came out: and the child became as one dead; insomuch that the more part said, he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and raised him up; and he arose." Thus bitter is the ejection of demons. The most pathetic and tremendous tragedies are witnessed in secret places where penitent souls wrestle in tears and blood with the evil passions and habits which have fastened upon them.

Difficulties are created without, as well as within, by backsliding. Society makes it easy for a man to sink and very painful for him to return. And if

society puts no stumbling-block in the way of the repentant sinner, his own conduct has created for himself miserable entanglements which require the utmost resolution to shake off. In the biography of Louis Agassiz occurs a striking account of his descent into the heart of a glacier. He was lowered by his assistants to a great depth in the ice, each foot of the descent being attended by peril; if, however, the descent was dangerous, the ascent was even more so, for the well was filled with large icicles, which pointing downward presented no obstacle in his descent, but now as the adventurer looked up the one hundred and twenty-five feet of blue ice, the sharp and dangerous points of hundreds of these javelins threatened to cut the rope or fall upon him. The ascent of the soul to the coign of vantage lost is usually similarly discouraging. The difficulty of the position is only understood when return is contemplated. Yes, it is ever a serious thing to fall away from faith and righteousness.

Yet let the great truth be laid to heart by the unhappy backslider that such recovery is possible.

There is in nature what physicists call a power of repair, an inherent power in an injured part to restore itself. Sir James Paget writes: "The power of repair is not confined to living things. Broken crystals can repair themselves as well as, e.g., broken bones. Wherever we find evidence of an end or design to be fulfilled in the attainment or maintenance of a definite form, there also we may find evidence of some power to repair the injuries which that form may sustain from forces external to itself." Does not the text seem

to point to this law of recovery active in the very constitution of things? "Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return?" It is natural to seek to repair any injury that we suffer; it is unnatural to surrender ourselves to the forces of disintegration and destruction.

There is also within the soul itself an instinct of hope which the greatest disaster can hardly extinguish. The doctrines of metempsychosis and of purgatory, in the opinion of some, show the natural unwillingness of men to believe in final defeat and failure. Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Picturing the conduct of men during an awful storm at sea, Victor Hugo observes: "By degrees, however, they began to hope again. Such are the unsubmergible mirages of the soul! There is no distress so complete but that even in the most critical moments the inexplicable sunrise of hope is seen in its depths." The text is an appeal to this very instinct. "Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return?" Is it not a natural instinct that, if one stumbles, he attempts to rise again? if one wanders, he seeks to return to the point whence he departed? God appeals to that instinct of recovery, that temper of hope, which He has established deep in the heart. However abjectly we sink, that bit of blue, that gilt of a star, that fainting halo of the sunset which yet lingers in the guiltiest soul, assures us that God has not forgotten to be gracious, and prompts us to penitence and faith, to hope and effort.

But, above all, how clear and full is the testimony of revelation to the possibility of the soul's recovery!

The Old Testament abounds with tender appeals to God's backsliding people. "Who gathereth the outcasts of Israel." Our Lord's treatment of Peter settled for all time the attitude of the New Testament to the prodigal son.

XVII

THE CITY: ITS SIN AND SAVIOUR

The great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.—Rev. xi. 8.

THE fact that our Lord was crucified nigh unto the sacred city is a suggestive fact we shall do well to ponder.

1. *The sinfulness of the city.* "Which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt."

Not that the obscenity and visible horror of Sodom were features of Jerusalem, but the sacred city resembled Sodom in its internal and vicious condition. Isaiah brought this accusation against his nation: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." And again: "They declare their sin as Sodom; they hide it not." Centuries later the impeachment is repeated in our text. "The great city which spiritually is called Sodom." The special sins of Sodom are noted by Ezekiel (xvi. 49). Pride, lust of the flesh, luxuriousness, "neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." Our Lord showed clearly the moral rottenness of the sacred city of His day.

"Which spiritually is called Egypt." Egypt was the land of slavery and persecution, and Israel had spir-

itually taken the place of Egypt, reproduced the characteristics of Egypt. The prophet Hosea utters the divine malediction: "They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of Mine offerings, and eat it; but the Lord accepteth them not: now will He remember their iniquity, and visit their sins; they shall return to Egypt." That was exactly what happened to them; they did not return to the geographical Egypt, but spiritually they did so. They became the bondslaves of selfishness, pride, greed, and unmercifulness. As our Lord showed when they boasted of freedom, they were abject slaves of unrighteousness. And as the Egyptians persecuted the people of God, modern Jerusalem played the rôle of the ancient tyrants, killing prophets and righteous men, and finally consummating their wickedness by crucifying the Messiah. Jesus Christ found Israel full of idols and slaves; the priests were taskmasters, and Pharoah sat on the chief seat of the synagogue. That the great city was "spiritually" called Sodom and Egypt does not mean that it was in any sense better than those accursed places; it means that the Jews were worse than the heathen, and that the Jerusalem which crucified our Lord was filled with corruptions more intense and abominable than the iniquity of Sodom or Egypt. It is quite possible for evil to lose its revolting expression whilst its actuality is untouched and its virus is increased tenfold.

The point specially to be observed is, that Jerusalem had become thus infamous through the abuse of religious privilege. It was a religious city that was spiritually called Sodom and Egypt; perverted religious opportunity made it pre-eminent in iniquity

and retribution. It was not Thebes, Babylon, Athens, nor Rome that reached supreme wickedness, but Jerusalem. Solemn truth to be laid to heart by us moderns! Jerusalem, with its mighty corruptions ending in unparalleled tragedy, could not have become what it was, could not have suffered what it did, had it not been for its vast advantages of light and blessing. Tyndall, writing on *The Forms of Water,* remarks: "Curious then as the conclusion may be, the cold ice of the Alps has its origin in the heat of the sun." By one set of conditions the sun calls forth the leaves of grass, the blossoms of the garden, the charm of flowers, the glory of the corn, and paints with emerald, purple, and gold the palm, the vine, and the orange; but through another set of conditions it causes snow and ice, and becomes the architect of the awful avalanches and glaciers of the Alps.

It is thus with religious truth and privilege. Accepted and improved, the light and grace of Heaven enrich with all glorious things; but resisted and misused, the light that is in us becomes darkness, our worst passions are evoked, the most terrible possibilities of our nature are revealed, our sins and iniquities swell to the skies in ghastly pinnacles of defiance. If the sun of righteousness does not create tropics of moral beauty, brightness, and blessing, it must, when denied and abused, create poles of unrighteousness whose blackness and horror are like hell. It took ages of privilege—temple, lawgivers, prophets, psalmists, oracles of God, and lastly the presence of our Lord Himself—to make possible the glaring scarlet of Jerusalem's consummated sin.

All evils come to their worst in great cities; the evils exist in petty forms and inconspicuous colours in rustic scenes, but the wealth, liberty, numbers, and rivalry of a great city bring them out broadly and luridly. It is a forcing-bed where every vice attains abnormal growth. And when the benign influences of religion are rejected, the wickedness is in the same proportion aggravated. It is urged as a proof of the inefficiency of Christianity that the sin and misery of our great cities are greater than that of the pagan and savage. That the sin and misery of the Christian civilization are greater than that of heathen lands we are ready to admit, but this is no proof of the inefficacy of Christianity. Christianity proves its virtue by making most noble those who welcome it; and, on the negative side, its virtue is vindicated in the bitterer iniquities and wretchedness of those who reject its mercy and grace. To degenerate needs vital power; and wherever religious force is not allowed to express itself in forms of health and beauty, it demonstrates itself in intensified disease and hideousness. "Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." Such is the penalty of high privilege wickedly abused.

2. *The Saviour of the city.* "Where also our Lord was crucified." Christ crucified is the one antidote for the city's wickedness and woe, even when that city is Jerusalem. This Book of the Revelation pictures a city of jasper and pearl, of gold and crystal, a city burning with splendour and brimming with felicity. What does this metropolis of gold and glory signify? The ideal city; what cities ought to be, what God means them to be. The civic capitals are to be made

after the jewelled pattern shown in the mount called Patmos; glorious in holiness, transfigured by truth streaming through all their garniture, raised into the music of perfect harmony, and satisfied with a fullness of felicity that knows no end. What, then, is the process by which communities are to be reconstructed, what the secret of their ultimate transfiguration and blessedness? Will this be brought about by civic ingenuity, by political reform, by industrial programmes, by social adjustments, by economics, literature, science, art, music? Not so, but primarily and concurrently by the gospel of the Crucified. The ideal city is "the bride, the Lamb's wife." "The lamp thereof is the Lamb." In the twelve foundations are the twelve names of the "apostles of the Lamb." "The Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." They only become its citizens "which are written in the Lamb's book of life." And their eternal refreshment and joy is "a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

We are not going to cleanse, enlighten, uplift and idealize our cities without God; and then it will only be through God as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in His redeeming Son. Every sin that blasts the city is condemned in the Cross; every inspiration that saves it flows from the Cross. Calvary testifies to the everlasting righteousness of God, to His mercy to the penitent, to His sympathy and grace with upstruggling humanity. It is the centre of holiness and mercy, of power and hope, of present and eternal salvation. Only in the Cross do we get at the root of the

mischief; only there do we find the essential blessing. God is in Christ crucified, reconciling the world unto Himself; and only as sinners find their way to the foot of the Cross are Babylon, Sodom, and Egypt transformed into the City of God. "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God."

XVIII

THE MORAL OF THE EMPTY GRAVE

Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which hath been crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, even as He said.—MATT. xxviii. 5, 6.

A DISTINGUISHED representative of science recently exhorted the religious world to rest its doctrines and hopes on the facts of nature and consciousness, and not on "an empty grave." But surely the facts of history also furnish a valid source of illumination and a secure basis of faith, and especially when such facts interpret the facts of nature and consciousness. The empty grave of our Lord is the best attested fact of antiquity, and is to the whole race of immense significance. What it meant to the first generation of Christians is readily seen in the Epistles of the New Testament. St. Paul makes very clear what he thought of our Lord's resurrection; he is content to rest the whole vast superstructure of the new faith on that empty grave. "For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised; and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain: ye are yet in your sins."

If we desire to learn what the immediately following generations of Christians thought of the fact and promise of our Lord's resurrection, the catacombs will

teach us. There pathetic testimonies abound to the consolatory truth that after the great Shepherd of the sheep had tasted the sharpness of death He rose from the grave and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. The glorious army of martyrs felt the power of Christ's resurrection, and found in it the secret of their triumph. Through the Christian centuries that empty grave has been the window into heaven. And if any one would understand what the resurrection of our Lord means to-day to the great host of dying men, let him visit the cemetery, and thousands of epitaphs testify that the sleepers sleep in peace because that empty grave throws the sweet light of hope on their resting-place. The hope of immortality is an instinct of the race; it is the vivifier of life; it reconciles us to the dust and ashes which end all human glory; and its supreme proof and symbol is the empty grave of Jesus Christ.

We speak of "empty space," and perhaps think lightly of it; we can respect space occupied by sun, moon, or star, but to speak of empty space seems like speaking of nothing, the absolute negation. The man of science, however, does not think thus. He knows that empty space is full of essential substance, of primal forces, of atmospheres and ethers without which there could not be life and light, music and beauty, and the ten thousand ornaments and delights of our planet. The earth with all its opulence and splendour arose out of empty space; it was not made of things which do appear. Beware when you speak of empty space! Empty space is crammed with reality. It is much the same when one speaks lightly of the "empty grave" of

our Lord: it is charged with vital elements, sovereign forces, glorious possibilities. History shows that all down the ages it has been the primal source of power, purity, consolation, and blessedness. Because our Lord's grave is empty, therefore is it the fountain of eternal energy and victory. As this round globe and all that it inherits arose out of empty space, so has Christendom arisen out of the empty grave of our Lord.

What, then, is the immortality that on this day our Lord brought to light?

It is *personal.* Philosophers and poets of a certain school think to satisfy our craving for immortality by assuring us that in death we shall melt into "the infinite azure," and live henceforth in the life of nature. Delivered from the crippling limitations of mortality we shall be transfused into the rainbow, share the pulsations of the sea, mingle with the fragrance of flowers, glow in the light of setting suns, sparkle in the stars. How eloquently Shelley dilates on the pantheistic creed! But the empty grave of our Lord reminds us that in perfected personality we enter upon our great inheritance. There is no scattering of the soul in the air, no melting in the infinite azure, but as a being with consciousness, knowledge, will, and affection, do I live beyond and live for ever. Christ came into the world to assure us of the fact and inviolability of personality as standing out from the universe; and His empty grave is the sign that upon our personality death has no power, but in the distinction and fullness of our faculty do we enter into glory.

It is *individual.* It is not the immortality of *patriot-*

ism. The hope of living in the future of one's nation is not the Christian hope. The Old Testament furnishes little direct and explicit teaching on immortality, as we conceive it. Then the individual largely forgot himself in the collective unity of his people; when the Hebrew thought of his great future, he recognized himself in the collective unity of his people; when the Hebrew thought of his great future, he recognized himself in the persistence of Israel. Very similarly the Greek and Roman speculated on the future; their aspiration for immortality was satisfied as they felt themselves identified with the splendour and permanence of their nation. This is not, however, the immortality pledged in the resurrection of Christ.

Nor is the Christian immortality that of *positivism.* Transcending the ideal of national futurity, positivism strives to satisfy us with the hope that we shall survive in the life of humanity. Corporate immortality involves a great truth which the sacred writers recognized long before Comte, but it does not supersede the fact and glory of that individual immortality which Easter Day pledges. Just as the modern telescope tends to break up the Milky Way, and to resolve its undistinguished light into individual orbs; so Christianity defines the vague splendour of nationality and humanity, showing that the humblest soul is like a star and dwells apart.

It is *moral.* Some have been tempted to think that immortality is bound up with intellectual power and merit, but the whole significance of the resurrection of our Lord is moral. If we are to share in the glory

of His ascended life, we must know the power of our Lord's resurrection raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. In the New Testament immortality is never treated as a philosophical question, but always as a moral one. Moral resurrection is the condition of everlasting life and blessedness. The spirit of holiness is the secret of glorious resurrection. If we are one day with joy to survey our empty tomb, it will be because He who is the resurrection and the life first brought our soul into the liberty of the glory of His dear children. "Then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

XIX

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.—EPH. i. 17-19.

AT Easter time the greatest mysteries of redemption occupy our thought, and every sincere soul must then be found in the attitude of the angels who "desire to look into these things." We are conscious that the great facts of redemption go far beyond us, that we have not sounded their depths, that they contain a wealth of light and blessing in which we have not entered. What lengths and breadths and depths and heights are in this very chapter before us! The apostle "prays that the Ephesians may have supernatural light shed upon the gold of their supernatural wealth."

It is our great privilege to grow in clearness of understanding, beholding with more open vision the beauty and preciousness of the truth as it is in Jesus. The first light that falls upon our spiritual understanding is marvellous light; but whilst we continue

obedient unto the heavenly vision, it will shine ever more brightly. In the lower world of animal life we find that creatures can receive wonderful accessions of seeing power. The caterpillar has a simple organ of vision only, but in the butterfly that simple organ has developed into a compound faceted eye with perhaps more than twenty thousand lenses. Are we not justified in taking this wonderful enhancement of sight in the lower stages of life as a rude prophecy of the larger virtue of vision latent in the soul, of the larger revelations of the divine mind and purpose reserved for the eyes of angels and men? The vision of a faithful soul grows in comprehensiveness and penetration, realizing with infinite delight the great and beautiful doctrines of the spiritual universe. It is true, alas! that some Christians do not seem to grow in insight and wisdom; they do not attain to the sylph-like perfection, but to the end abide old caterpillars. "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God." The design of God is that we should with maturing years see more of Him who dwells in the thick darkness; that we should apprehend more adoringly the Divine Son of His love; that the incarnation of our Lord, His atoning death, and His resurrection from the dead should grow upon us, yielding their secrets, and moulding us irresistibly.

The biographer of the late Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, says of him: "He lived under the benignant sway

of a succession of great truths, following one another like the constellations of the heavens." In successive periods of his life familiar truths in succession became extraordinary, captivating him, filling him with wonder, thrilling him with delight. Is not this the ideal life? First one and then another article of the creed glowing into light, dawning on the soul, seizing it, occupying it, delighting it, leaving it with special enrichment and perfection! As the constellations of the heavens pass unceasingly and majestically, raising thoughts of wonder and admiration in all noble minds, so, O God, let the great truths of Thy Holy Word cross our soul's horizon—inspiring, uplifting, hallowing all within. God is discovering in a marvellous way larger measures of His glory in the physical sphere, and we ought not to be content except He unveil to us more fully the glory of His Son, and delight our soul with the exceeding abundance of His grace. A true course is one of progressive illumination. No Christian life is altogether right and satisfactory except more light, and more, is shining upon it out of God's Word—except uninteresting bits of the raiment of the truth are continually being transfigured; except passages which resemble darkened glass are becoming telescopic; unless commonplace chapters of historian, prophet, and apostle suffer a strange change into streets of gold whose stones are like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and unless starless spaces in the firmament of revelation are being sown with galaxies, and irradiated with the glory of the Lord.

Note that the sources of illumination are within.

"Having the eyes of your heart enlightened." It is insight rather than reflected light; it springs up in the depths of the soul. This is not the instruction gained by intellectual study; it is rather experimental, coming through the inner powers of affection, thought, and will. We think we can see the truths of the universe only with the eyes of the theoretic understanding; but the fact remains that sincerity of purpose, purity of heart, and spirituality of life give an availing acquaintance with the magnificent truths of the divine calling, and with that surpassing greatness of the divine power which makes our calling effectual.

XX

FADDISM IN FAITH AND CHARACTER

That we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.—EPH. iv. 14.

IN one of Darwin's letters we read this: "It is a sad flaw, I cannot but think, in my beloved Dr. Gully, that he believes in everything. When Miss —— was very ill, he had a clairvoyant girl to report on internal changes, a mesmerist to put her to sleep, a homeopathist, viz., Dr. ——, and himself as hydropathist! and the girl recovered." Our purpose is not to expatiate on the miracle reported in the closing line of this paragraph, but rather to point out that the freakishness displayed by Dr. Gully in the medical world is, with increasing frequency we are afraid, being reproduced by sincere people in matters of belief, devotion, and character. In all religious circles these faddists are found. They are abnormally susceptible to new-fangled notions, greedily fall in with novelties, and are every whit as fanciful as Dr. Gully was in his special vocation. Almost contemptuous of tried methods and historical beliefs, they consider their quick sympathy with the novelties of the religious world a sign of advanced spirituality. We know beforehand

the people who are likely to be infected by eccentric movements.

We anticipate the defence not unlikely to be set up for these. It may be argued, and not unreasonably, that aberrant souls who disconcert routine are sometimes exceedingly valuable to society, and not less so to religious society. People accounted bizarre constitute the seed-plot whereon new ideas and enthusiasms are tested; if a novelty contains truth or relevancy it gets a chance to assert itself, if it is a crotchet merely it dies away. The sports of the social world are deeply interesting, there is no predicting to what they may grow; the accepted beliefs and indispensable programmes of to-day were only a little while ago scouted as wayward and fantastic. The rigidly conservative, who ruthlessly ban every variant thought and thing, usurp the office of the Hebrew midwives, and kill the millennial age as it comes to birth. Nevertheless, we must guard against crazes, and the volatility of mind that is captivated by the last grotesque toy of opinion and method. Darwin was no enemy of fresh thought, but he knew the difference between the erratic and the original, and could not approve of the vagaries of his beloved doctor who "believed in everything." Variation is a prominent feature of nature; she is, however extremely jealous lest it should be carried to excess. The naturalist finds the most ingenious arrangements to exist in the structure of many plants, "that undue variation from type may be checked." Nature knows the preciousness of new, strange things, but will not allow her grounds to swarm with hybrids, monsters, and an infinity of freaks.

Singularities of view and action, on the possession or execution of which even good people are tempted to plume themselves, are more often a defect than a merit. Vagaries are not necessarily virtues, although often mistaken for such by those who display them. The commonplace aspects of the man's character and life, as a rule, are infinitely more significant than his whims. We are told that the chief fascination of orchid-culture lies in the fact that an exceptional flower may be found in a common variety—the albinos of a coloured variety, spotted flowers of white varieties, or the flowers of freak form—and yet all the time the exceptional flower, from the point of loveliness, is distinctly inferior to that of the common variety; it is a decadent taste that prefers the sport, the ordinary types being usually far more beautiful. A collection of birds was recently shown in the Crystal Palace, when, once more, the "sports" formed the centres of attraction. A yellow-hammer with red eyes of an albino, a snow-white blackbird, a dove-coloured greenfinch, and a white sky-lark, were the cynosure of all eyes; although every competent critic would acknowledge that the real perfection of the songsters was found in the fine examples of the ordinary type. Something like disease lurks within these speckled flowers and birds; and the eccentric individual who complacently accentuates his crotchets mistakes weakness for strength, his warts for his glory. The real worth of men is not in private interpretations, in quaint phrases, in the following of unaccustomed ways, or in unique philanthropies—these may or may not be signs of superiority; but when our aberrations prompt the

neighbours to sum us up as cranks, the interest attaching to us is rather that of the harlequin orchid or the white blackbird. Real merit ordinarily demonstrates itself by giving fruitful applications to trite truths, and by carrying commonplace virtues to a rare perfection.

Inordinate idiosyncrasies destroy the faith of people in our judgment and character; originality is so rare that we are suspected and not taken seriously when we affect too much of it. To yield to the habit of fancifulness tends to distract attention from the fundamental truths and duties by which we live. Crotchetiness is also a waste of power; energy of mind and heart, so precious for the upbuilding of character, and efficiency of life are frittered away on dubious ends. Faddism feeds vanity, the unique one generally reckoning himself the nonsuch professor. And, finally, the tendency of exotic opinions and odd ways is antisocial; the more we insist on quaint notions, the more isolated we become, and the less capable of taking part in the great movements which design the salvation of the world.

XXI

DEFENCE AND DEFIANCE

Put on the whole armour of God.—Eph. vi. 11.

THE motto of our volunteers is "Defence, not defiance," but in the war with evil we must adopt the title of this chapter. "The whole armour of God," or what is called elsewhere "the armour of light," is the sanctification of our whole nature through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only panoply invulnerable by evil. Wherever a defect in character exists—a weakness of the soul—there is a flaw in our armour which may well prove fatal. No magic prevails against evil influences and things. There is no availing natural magic; no amulets, charms, or incantations. There is no ecclesiastical magic; no baptism, sacrament, or sign of the cross will avail anything, except it is associated with personal faith and purity. The devil monopolizes the magic; and a pure soul is no more afraid of his black arts than a philosopher is troubled by the vapourings of a magician.

Defence against the sins which beset us is implied in our text. The faithful disciple of Christ is secure in fidelity to the truth, in the power of purity, in the peace which garrisons his heart, in the love of God

and goodness, in his pervasive righteousness, in his fellowship with Heaven, in his faith and hope laying hold of eternal life. The Lord Jesus, all love and beauty, was the most hopeless target against which demon ever shot an arrow; and as the mind of Christ dwells in us and the spotlessness of His life is attained by us we also become the despair of hell. The grosser temptations fail to deprave one who is clothed in the shining mail of holiness. Just recently at the Cape a diver was pursuing his vocation in the depths when his hand was suddenly seized by the tentacle of a gigantic octopus. Fortunately, with the other hand, the man was able to transmit the danger-signal to his companions above, who immediately raised him. On the unfortunate diver emerging from the waters the spectators were horrified to see that his armour was almost entirely enveloped in the slimy folds of the frightful devil-fish, which only relaxed its grasp when hewed to pieces by axes.

How that submerged explorer in the awful embrace of the sea-monster would bless the brazen panoply in which he was encased, and which ensured salvation! What that armour was to the diver in his ghastly conflict in the muddy abyss—the love of truth, the power of holiness, the refuge of prayer are to a sincere soul assaulted by dark temptations. The purest saint is exposed to odious perils. Inherited evil in mind or temperament seeks to enswathe our personality, and suck up our better life; sometimes sins of the flesh close on us loathsomely; and again, our environment arouses ugly and shuddering appetites; if we let down our moral tone, we are defenceless against cruel lusts,

but no octopus of darkness grips a soul sincerely pure. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord." No sooner is the danger-signal given than we are lifted into the light, and delivered from monstrousness. "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

The more subtle forms of sin are equally innocuous to the pure in heart. The temptations of our Lord were of this more delicate character; and as He overcame in His passion of purity, so will His disciples. There is no gross tangibility in the temptations to which many good people are subject; the enemy attacks with unseen array and smokeless powder. "Spiritual wickedness in high places." The development of electricity has brought with it a new kind of peril that has set inventors on devising anti-electric armour; and recently a coat of mail was fabricated that is effectual against the dangers of high-tension electricity. The protection consists in a garment of fine close brass gauze, which envelopes the body and extremities entirely, so that the current, if it should pass over the body, will only get as far as the metallic surface, and be then conducted off harmlessly. Thus the occult forces of evil, the temptations which appeal to the mind and heart, are neutralized by the delicate mail, the spiritual armour, which guarantees the salvation of faithful souls. We cannot read the whole passage whence our text is taken without feeling that the atmosphere of life is charged with malign electricities, which work deadly mischief unless we are sheltered from head to foot in the invisible anti-electric

armour which Heaven silently and constantly forges about pure-hearted men.

The *defiance* of evil. It is not enough to defend ourselves from the assaults of evil; we must challenge and fight it at every step, even when it does not decisively challenge us. Are we not often conscious of possibilities of evil in our nature which are permitted to remain undisturbed whilst they do not actively disturb us? From time to time they signify their presence, but so long as they are latent only they are ignored. We do not act thus with the diseases of the body. We no sooner suspect the existence of a bodily malady than we do our best to bring it to the light, to ascertain its real character, and to deal with it as drastically as we may. In our spiritual warfare we ought to follow the same course, anticipating evil, challenging it, carrying the war into the enemy's camp. To "let sleeping dogs lie" is not sound policy in the moral life. Our attitude must be aggressive, whether evil is palpable or obscure.

We must deal with evil in an uncompromising spirit, allowing no truce, granting no quarter. It is an axiom with the military that a purely defensive war must end in defeat; and certainly we often fail in spiritual warfare because we do not press the battle to the gate, and thoroughly subjugate the enemy when God gives us his neck. We must deal with evil in the spirit of abounding courage and confidence. He who is in us is more than he who is in the world, and we ought to know it and strike home. We must also struggle against evil in the full assurance of final victory. "When Immanuel," says John Bunyan, "had

driven Diabolus and all his forces out of the City of Mansoul, Diabolus preferred a petition to Immanuel, that he might have only a small part of the city. When this was rejected, he begged to have only a little room within the walls; but Immanuel answered, He should have no place in it at all, no, not to rest the sole of his foot." To this end and in this confidence we must pursue the struggle. We often fail in defence because we are lacking in the spirit of defiance; and the whole conception of the New Testament touching the spiritual war is that it will be won in the spirit of defiance.

XXII

PLOUGHING THE SANDS

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence.—Hos. ii. 14, 15.

DR. WALLACE tells us that one of the most peculiar and least generally considered features of our earth, but one which is also essential to the development and maintenance of the rich organic life it possesses, is the uninterrupted supply of atmospheric dust which is now known to be necessary for the production of rain clouds and beneficial rains and mists, and without which the whole course of meteorological phenomena would be so changed as to endanger the very existence of a large portion of the life upon the earth. Now, the chief portion of this fine dust, distributed through the upper atmosphere, from the equator to the poles, with wonderful uniformity, is derived from those great terrestrial features which are often looked upon as the least essential, and even as blots and blemishes on the fair face of nature—deserts and volcanoes. Most persons, no doubt, think they could both be very well spared, and that the earth would be greatly improved, from a human point of view, if they were altogether abolished. Yet

it is almost a certainty that the consequences of doing so would be to render the earth infinitely less enjoyable, and, perhaps, altogether uninhabitable by man.

In most human lives are periods closely corresponding with the deserts of the earth: times and conditions distinctly stale, flat, and apparently unprofitable; spaces of compulsory isolation and solitariness; seasons of intellectual infertility and depression; stretches of drudgery; tedious spells of personal affliction; times of enforced inaction; years of dullness, dreariness, and barrenness. Destitute of the ordinary interests, excitements, and charms of life, we may justly reckon such periods as constituting the wilderness stages of our pilgrimage. Of these monotonous interludes we think and speak regretfully. They are looked upon as the waste part of life, the days when we simply marked time, when we ploughed the sand. What the desert is to nature, a blot and blemish; that, we conclude, are the grey, featureless terms of human life. Yet may we not be mistaken about our dreary days and years as we are in our estimate of the worth of deserts in the system of nature? As Dr. Wallace reminds us, indirectly we get our vineyards from the Sahara; and is it any more difficult to believe that what we are tempted to call the waste places of life fulfil a mission similarly benign and precious? The deserts of nature and the colourless episodes of time are immensely more enriching than at first sight appears. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." Ploughing the sands is a more profitable form of agriculture than some clever persons think.

Tedious, sterile, and lonely periods may serve us eminently by concentrating for a while our thoughts upon ourselves. When the environment is full of movement and colour, of incident and interest, our mind is naturally occupied with it; and not rarely occupied with it to the total exclusion of introspection and self-acquaintance. When our circumstances cease to absorb our thought, the opportunity is given to commune with our own heart, and to become acquainted with the facts of our personality. Richard Semon has an instructive passage on the intellectual benefit of isolation and monotony: "The immense Australian bush offers genuine solitude. At first this solitude was new and interesting to me, and it used to bring me lonely hours and a sense of abandonment; but finally I felt it like a great and mighty revelation, a thing as vivid and intense as the witnessing of the most varied scenes amongst foreign lands and nations. It gives a man time and a chance to look into his innermost self, to see himself, not as he appears in the eyes of his neighbours, but in his relation to great, ever-creating, ever-destroying nature." This naturalist merely considers the intellectual advantages of the wilderness life in self-acquaintance, and a better appreciation of our relation to nature; but those lonely and dreary passages of life from which we shrink give us time and a chance to look into our heart, to become acquainted with the secrets of character, to know our relation to God. As a rule the world is too much with us to allow either time or energy for introspection; but outward stagnation and insipidity give opportunity for a greater and mightier revelation than Semon received, even the

more perfect knowledge of ourselves in the sight of God. *"Therefore,* behold, I will bring her into the wilderness." The context shows that God marred the glory of Israel and brought her into dreary conditions, that she might see her real self and prepare to meet her Lord.

God brings His people into dull and desolate surroundings that they may be fitted for the greater tasks which await them. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." How strikingly that law has been illustrated in the history of many great historic characters! Moses kept the flock of Jethro behind the desert. After his conversion Paul withdrew to Arabia for purposes of reflection. John at Patmos beheld his splendid vision. Luther shut up in the Castle of the Wartburg translated the Bible. John Bunyan was imprisoned that he might dream his glorious dream. And John Wesley in squalid Georgia was disciplined for his great mission. Let us never be impatient when brought into desert places. The Pentateuch, the Epistles of St. Paul, the Apocalypse, the German Bible, the *Pilgrim's Progress,* the Evangelical Revival, and a thousand other purple vineyards of moral and spiritual wealth were vouchsafed to us from the wilderness. We may not be likely to do things after this heroic measure; but our future success in life depends far more on the faithful improvement of disappointing days, uncongenial circumstances, dreary tasks, and unfruitful strivings than youth imagines. He who is faithful, diligent, and hopeful when life stretches around

All dark and barren as a rainy sea,

will bring his barque to the golden isles; he who bravely ploughs the sand and casts his seed into the dull furrow shall find it at length a garden of vines, fig-trees, and pomegranates.

Earthly life is sometimes sobered that the heavenly world may the better assert its existence and claims. When human life is excited, distracted, and absorbed by terrestial things, the heavenlies are liable to be forgotten and obscured. Living on the wide, unattractive plains of Mesopotamia the ancients turned their attention to the stars, there so conspicuously in evidence. Mr. Hudson, writing of the scenery of Patagonia, remarks: "On the wild flying clouds appeared a rainbow with hues so vivid that we shouted aloud with joy at the sight of such loveliness. . . . I do not suppose that the colours were really more vivid than in numberless other rainbows I have seen; it was, I think, the universal greyness of earth and heaven in that grey winter season, in a region where colour is so sparsely used by nature, that made it seem so supremely beautiful, so that the sight of it affected us like wine." The tameness of earth fascinated the Babylonians with the magnificence of the stars; the greyness of the landscape intoxicated the naturalist with the glory of the rainbow; and the dullness, weariness, and sterility of this earthly life give the eternal world a better chance to command the thought and affection of the soul.

XXIII

ELEVATION AND VISION

After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter. —Rev. iv. 1.

IT is a serious error to suppose that we can rightly apprehend the highest truths whilst we live on a low plane of thought and conduct, and yet it is a very common error. Those who grovel in the dust, nay, who wallow in the sensual mire, yet believe themselves competent to discuss the most solemn problems of existence and destiny; they conclude that the truths concerning God—His existence, laws, government, revelation, and purpose—are apprehended and understood mentally like theories of mechanics and mathematics. It is a profound mistake; divinest verities are revealed only to the upward gaze and the uplifted life.

It is a matter of popular knowledge that the human eye, as an organ of vision, is not commensurate with the whole range of solar radiation, and that it is incapable of receiving visual impressions from all the rays emitted by the sun. Beyond the violet at one end of the spectrum are rays so intense as to be invisible, and

beyond the red at the other end of the spectrum are rays whose feebler action render them equally invisible; beyond the violet and the red the vibrations in the light ether make no appeal to the optic nerve, we are unconscious of colours actually before our eyes, of beams of light which the chemist knows to be of the first consequence. So a world of truth exists which in the very nature of things is for ever hidden from the secularized soul. The carnal eye may distinguish certain great religious and ethical facts and distinctions, but eternal realities of the very first importance are inaccessible to the blurred and feeble sense. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged."

To see eternal realities with open vision we must preserve a pure and sensitive soul. Only as the Spirit of God refines our perceptions, works in us clearness of insight, endows us with spiritual imagination and sensibility, are we qualified to apprehend, mirror, and appropriate the truths by which men live. Recently in some experiments in colour photography it was attempted to reproduce the colours of the spectrum. The experiment succeeded so far as the bars of colour in the interval between the violet and the red were concerned; but the camera failed to represent the ultra hues, the film was not sufficiently sensitive to seize the hidden mystery of colour, and a couple of blotches alone witnessed to the existence of the unseen rays. Thus a coarsened soul in its dark misgivings bears witness to unseen things, yet it lacks the subtlety to discern and realize the glorious realities of the

transcending universe. Our spirit must be uplifted by fellowship with God, made sensitive by purity, refined by love, kept steady by a great hope and confidence, or it cannot reflect and realize eternal verities. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"; and seeing Him, the whole universe becomes like unto clear glass. "Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man," are revealed in the pure heart by the Holy Spirit. It is not so much by intellectual acuteness as by truth and purity in the inward parts that we lay hold of the things of God. Keep, then, the soul bright and fair, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe."

To apprehend justly and influentially eternal truths our life must be lofty in its spirit and aim. Infidelity and pessimism just now are rampant amongst us, and we need not wonder at this when we remember the prevalence of a worldly and selfish temper. The real explanation of our dubiety and despair is not to be sought in our intellectual defects and limitations, but rather in the narrowness, egotism, and debasement of our thoughts, ideals, and strivings. We need to get on a higher plane of thinking, sympathy, and purpose. "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter." The Almighty could not unveil to John eternal spheres, realities, and relations whilst

he continued on the depressed levels where men ordinarily live; only was this possible as the seer attained a vaster horizon and breathed an ampler air. "Come up hither, and I will show thee." Is not that the call of God to us? Come up out of that yellow fog of covetousness, that tinted vapour of vanity, that blinding smoke of pride and self-will, that sandstorm of worldliness, that enveloping cloud of animal appetite and passion, and you shall know the glorious things freely given you of God. In the elevated mood, which becomes an elevated habit, He grants a comforting and transforming consciousness of Himself; He gives delicate interpretations of His will; He reveals His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus; He makes us to taste the powers of the world to come. It is only through the high life of entire consecration, of constant communion with the skies, of intense and sustained spiritual sympathy, that we get insight into the deep things of God. We are told that from the bottom of a pit the stars are visible at noonday, but to those who are content to dwell in the murky depths of low thinking, feeling, and action, the lights of the upper universe are lost in impenetrable obscuration. "Come up hither, and I will show thee."

What is our response to this invitation? Are we willing to renounce all the attractions of the lower life, to yield ourselves to our noblest impulses and dare the life of thoroughgoing holiness, to frame our ways after the purest patterns and standards, to delight ourselves in the Lord and in His commandments and service? If we are thus responsive to the heavenly call, we shall rejoice in an inner light and assurance

that will fill our heart with peace, such as no polemical volume or debating society could secure us. Practical purity is the best medium for supernatural revelation. If our souls are to gain light and certainty, we must live more nearly as we pray. Character is the chief source of illumination; noble conduct best augments the inner light; life aspiring to high standards rather than logic divines the secrets of eternity. If we consent to live higher, purer, worthier lives, it will do far more for the clearness and certitude of our faith than a whole world of controversy. Standing by our Master's side in the heavenlies He whispers us in the ear, and we saints know.

XXIV

ELEVATION AND STRENGTH

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.—EPH. i. 3.

That ye may know . . . the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places.—EPH. i. 18-20.

EVERY spiritual blessing is the gift of Christ, but these blessings are realized only as we live in the "heavenlies." "He has raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." Words implying habitual, permanent elevation. We are not "caught up into paradise" for a fugitive moment, it is not an ecstasy, but in Him we are privileged to live on a high plane of thought and sentiment, of experience and achievement; our affections being "set" on things above, the whole character of our mind, heart, and life transcending the terrestrial. The highest blessings are attained only as we live lives of distinct spirituality and consecration. The special gift we now contemplate is that of power, and our duplicated text teaches that elevation is the condition of moral strength and efficiency.

Nothing in our day is more thought about, written about, sought after, than power, the discovery of any new kind of force being hailed with universal satisfaction. The way in which we have learned to use various manifestations of physical energy is the chief distinction of our age. But no force is comparable in its preciousness to that spiritual might by which we reach the ideal of character, attain victory over our foes, and find ourselves competent for the discharge of every duty. Humanity needs the power to fulfil its highest ideals more than it needs any other power whatever. This is the power of Pentecost, the most glorious gift we may covet; and it is ours only as we aspire to a life of elevated purpose, experience, and action.

Scientists and philosophers have much to say about a kind of force that they distinguish as "energy of position." There is a certain locked-up motion in an elevated body: a force which demonstrates itself when the body is released, energy of position being converted into energy of motion. We get an exemplification of this theory in pile-driving machines: slowly the ram creeps to the top of the machine, attaining energy of position; then the releasing hook frees the massive body, which falls with accumulated force on the pile-head. The tourist step by step pushes his machine along the steep mountain-side, but having reached the crest has no more trouble, he has won energy of position, and sweeps down succeeding slopes in triumph. Niagara supplies an apt illustration of the doctrine of energy of position. The deep fall of the mighty river creates or liberates an amazing force which, when duly conserved, is capable of effecting immense results—

driving machinery, lighting with electricity remote cities, and accomplishing manifold purposes of utility. Throughout the physical world we witness the marvellous efficacy of energy of position: elevation is efficiency.

Society supplies fresh proof of the realty and effectiveness of energy of position. Speaking of "the upper ten," we use a suggestive metaphor—one that indicates a ruling class whose immense influence is the energy of elevated position. This class comprises men of wealth, culture, and rank; slowly they acquired gold, scholarship, or title; slowly they accumulated power, and now from elevated place they exercise a political and social influence of the first consequence. The "upper ten" in many palpable ways demonstrate the fact and competence of energy of position.

But the text reminds us of the supreme import of elevation in the moral life. Stupendous power resides in a soul that lives high above the world, one familiar with eternity, ever steeping in the light. Christian believers may not always impress us with the sense of force; their power is often power in a state of rest, they are restrained, passive, patient; but no sooner are they brought into circumstances of difficulty, of arduous duty, of severe temptation, of bitter deprivation and suffering, than they discover tremendous energy and prove complete masters of the situation: the potential becomes the actual, energy of position is converted into energy of victorious action, the erstwhile passive saints acquit themselves as heroes and martyrs. Not for nothing have they lived on high, mused on holy things, talked with God, drunk from

eternal fountains; when the occasion arises they are equal to it, they have strength to subordinate the lower nature, to fulfil obligation, to make the costliest sacrifices: they develop power for watching, working, fighting for life and death. Irresistible and invincible forces accumulate in a soul that habitually dwells with God; it knows perfectly how real is the energy of position. A while ago a literary authority, in addressing an audience interested in the drama, asked, Could a very good man be a hero? He answered "No"; the exceptionally good man could not be a hero of drama. In the first place, the drama dwelt with action, and the saint was passive. Then again, the drama dealt with emotions, and the saint was a man who had subdued emotion. In the third place, what an audience looked for in a hero was an exhibition of mastery, of force, of something significant. This gentleman's conception of a saint was partial; he left out the complimentary aspect of saintly character. Sometimes the saint does appear passive, passionless, unassertive; his energy is in a state of rest: but change his circumstances, and his glorious potentiality flashes forth; he reveals action, emotion, mastery of the sublimest character.

Is not the main deficiency with many of us the lack of instinctive, adequate, triumphant moral power? Too often we sadly fail in the trying hour; and when we do not absolutely fail, we are conscious of miserable insufficiency. In one of his letters Stevenson refers regretfully to the paralyzing influence of ill-health upon his literary work. "I have never at command that press of spirits necessary to strike out a thing red-

hot. A certain languor marks the whole. It is not, in short, art." How many of us are conscious of a similar moral feebleness marring our character and action! We do at length arrive, we muddle through, our calling and work are finished after a fashion, but faintness and failure are everywhere in evidence. We have not at command the spiritual vigour necessary to strike out things of duty and service red-hot—immediate, complete, triumphant. "That ye may know the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ," leave the lower levels, aspire to a life of entire dedication, seek the closer walk. The tonic is in the mountain air. He who lives in the heavenly places shares in the majestic strength of the glorified Lord, under whose feet all things are put in subjection.

XXV

ELEVATION AND SAFETY

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.—Ps. xci. 1.

IN the highest moods of thought and feeling we enjoy an immunity impossible to those who do not live a whole-hearted spiritual life. If we would be safe, we must live near God, dwell in His secret place, high above the levels of the unspiritual. The higher life, or rather the highest life, is the condition of absolute security.

The devil uses the stratagem of elevation, just as the hawk does. Thus he approached our Lord. "Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple." "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." So still from enchanted heights does the enemy of souls beguile men, and, alas! too often captures them. Here he brings the ambitious, luring them with a seat in the cabinet; here also he dazzles the covetous, showing them twenty per cent.; and here he intoxicates the sensualist, showing him the land below decked with the lotus and the rose. All temptation implies dangerous elevation—an excitement of the

senses, a kindled imagination, an exaltation of the moods and emotions of the soul. The tempted are always poised on a pinnacle: from the dizzy mountain brow they survey the glittering scene to which distance lends enchantment.

How shall we resist this sorcery, and be secure against the glamour of dangerous heights of fancy and feeling? Wherein was the salvation of our Lord when He was tempted as we are? He went higher still. "The prince of the power of the air" essays his arts of deception and fascination high up in the realm of cloudland and mirage; but our Lord went outside the atmosphere altogether, and judged the earth from the depths of the heavens. The "wicked one" exercised over our Lord no fascination, played Him no trick, touched Him not, because He ever judged the earthly in the light of the heavenly, the human in the light of the divine, the temporal in the light of the eternal. "Come up, and I will show thee," cries a master of illusions, thrusting into our hand the cup of sorcery. "Come up, and I will show thee," cries a voice out of heaven; and if we regard that invitation from on high, the cup of intoxication is shattered, and the wine of its fornication is as water spilled on the ground. The way to master temptation is to transcend it. The peril of selfishness is best vanquished by a grander selfishness, which is ready to lose its life for the sake of the life eternal; the peril of insobriety is most effectually mastered by the rarer intoxication of being filled with the Spirit; and the peril of worldliness is past to those who look upon the heavenly vision of the immortal treasures and delights of the spiritual universe.

If terrestrial things are not to prove a snare, we must cherish the elevated mood and dwell in the secret place of the Most High. One side of the dangerousness of human life is to misconceive the place and purpose of the secular world, and therefore to exaggerate or despise it; but the man of spiritual thought and devout feeling, he who is familiar with the larger law and purpose of God, he who abides in the secret place of the Most High and makes that his standpoint of judgment, has got the true perspective, knows the just proportion, and uses the world without abusing it. He weighs all things in unerring balances, measures them with the angel's golden reed. We are naturally the slaves of the best, the biggest, the brightest that we know, and nothing can emancipate us from the dominion of the present but to see, to taste, to follow the far grander conceptions of a godly life. The roses of the summer may entice those who have not known the fadeless amaranth; broken cisterns charm the thirsty who have not tasted the upper springs; rifted lutes are sweet to ears ignorant of celestial music; and the pedlar's toys of human pride are alluring to those who have not grasped the jewels of spiritual proprietorship and dominion. We are safe from the world only as we transcend it. We must all be Dantes, familiar with the holy laws, the far-off horizons, the solemn imagery of the eternal world, if we are to estimate aright the interests, relationships, pleasures, and sufferings of this present life.

We fight successfully positive temptations to sin only whilst we draw our motives and inspirations from the highest sources. Every step taken into a higher,

holier life secures a completer immunity from the power of evil. Virtually there is no temptation to those who climb high enough; they still suffer the trial of their faith and principle, but they have no evil thought, no affinity with evil, it exercises over them no fascination, it is to them as though it were not. Never deal with temptation on low utilitarian grounds of health, reputation, or interest. If you have a vice, convict it at Sinai; arraign it at the bar of the Judgment Day; make it ashamed of itself at the feet of Christ; blind it with heaven; scorch it with hell; take it into the upper air where it cannot get its breath, and choke it.

> And chok'st thou not him in the upper air
> His strength he will still on the earth repair.

Migratory birds invisible to the eye have been detected by the telescope crossing the disc of the sun six miles above the earth. They have found one of the secret places of the Most High; far above the earth, invisible to the human eye, hidden in the light, they were delightfully safe from the fear of evil. Thus it is with the soul that soars into the heavenly places; no arrow can reach it, no fowler betray it, no creature of prey make it afraid; it abides in the shadow of the Almighty.

XXVI

ELEVATION AND PEACE

The mountains shall bring peace to the people.—Ps. lxxii. 3.

PEACE originates in strength and loftiness; elevation is the condition of power and calm. Peace within ourselves can be established only by the very highest and most penetrating considerations. What an abyss of contradictions and conflicts is the human breast! The cosmic struggle is reflected in the heart of man. Our deepest discontent and misery spring out of this schism and internecine warfare. And how trivial and unavailing are the efforts of the natural man to reconcile himself to himself, to get rid of the burden and friction of a nature at war within itself! Our Lord indicates this. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful." "Not as the world giveth." The natural man attempts to rid himself of the cruel burden of the soul by boldly denying its existence; he plots to evade the painful sense of interior discord by distracting and absorbing his thought upon the outside world; he snatches intervals of unconsciousness in the anæsthetics of fashion or indulgence; but whatever is done is shallow and ineffectual, he never

establishes peace within himself, at best only a truce. We know a war picture entitled, "A Quiet Day in a Battery"; it represents artillerists enjoying precarious moments of leisure and refreshment ere they are summoned to imminent action by the peal of the trumpet and the thunder of the guns. Intervals of rest in the warfare of the soul are after this sort; the painful struggle of the spirit against the flesh, the reason against the passions, the conscience against the inclination and will, may be momentarily suspended, but it is not finished, anon it breaks out again as bitter and fierce as ever.

"Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The disorder of our nature can be successfully treated only from above. The method of the New Testament is to satisfy the conscience by the atonement of Calvary; to destroy the virus of evil which poisons the heart; to vivify the affections by the enthusiasm of love; to strengthen the will in righteousness. It is miserably disappointing to deal with the anarchy of our nature on the low, superficial grounds to which the world invites us. If we covet the radical pacification of a warring soul, we must go for our motives and specifics to a transcending world; great thoughts, stimulations, and succours are indispensable. We must tremble on Sinai, see the vision from Nebo's top, prove the virtue of the green hill beyond a city's wall, drink in the teachings of Olivet, and know the transfigurating grace of Tabor. Only in heavenly places can we treat effectually the tumult, malignancy, and weakness of the heart. J. F. Millet has a saying: "Art lives by passion alone, and a man cannot be deeply moved by

nothing." True holiness is born in passion, it lives by passion alone, and here specially a man cannot be deeply moved by nothing. The consciousness of God, the knowledge of His everlasting righteousness, the experience of the truth, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ, the sense of eternity—these high truths can deeply move us, restrain us, inspire us, guarantee our utmost salvation, and nothing else can.

Peace amid the frictions and wounds of outward life is only possible whilst the soul is uplifted and invigorated by heavenly virtue. Only as we transcend our troubles can we master them. The greatness and loftiness of the mountain must pass into our mind, the wideness and depth of the sea into our heart, if we are to live untroubled by the vicissitudes of human fortune. A thousand pretentious maxims and manœuvres designed to keep trouble at a distance are little less than absurd; vexation and pain must be swallowed up in thoughts and consolations not of this world. The psalmist bemoans himself: "Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, I would lodge in the wilderness. I would haste me to a shelter from the stormy wind and tempest." There is a truer way than this out of a painful situation.

Mr. Hudson tells us that in Patagonia he was much surprised by the behaviour of a couple of sweet songsters during a thunderstorm. On a still, sultry day in summer he was standing watching masses of black cloud coming rapidly over the sky, while a hundred yards from him stood the two birds also apparently watching the approaching storm with interest. Pres-

ently the edge of the cloud touched the sun, and a twilight gloom fell on the earth. The very moment the sun disappeared the birds rose up and began singing their long resounding notes, though it was loudly thundering at the time, while vivid flashes of lightning lit the black cloud overhead. He watched their flight and listened to their notes, till suddenly as they made a wide sweep upwards they disappeared in the cloud, and their voices seemed to come from an immense distance. The cloud continued emitting sharp flashes of lightning, but the birds never reappeared, and after six or seven minutes once more their notes sounded loud and clear above the muttering thunder. They had passed through the cloud into the clear atmosphere above it, and the naturalist expresses his surprise at their fearlessness.

But really did not these sweet singers, passing through the thunder-cloud and singing above it, show us the true policy for dark days? We must not attempt to evade our troubles, not to resist them, not to fly before them, but simply to transcend them. Soaring into the clear atmosphere above, the thunder will not terrify nor the lightning smite. We become oblivious of a score of things which irritate and wound others to madness. Just as those wise, brave birds mounted beyond the tempest into the blue heavens and golden sunshine, so the devout soul in faith and prayer, in hallowed thought and feeling, wings its way into the calm azure of the heaven of heavens until the storms are overpast and gone. Even whilst yet in the flesh we are with the angels, and with glorified spirits who dwell in the stillness where beyond these voices

there is peace. In those serene heights Christ dwells, and ever exhorts His people, Lift up your eyes to the heavens where I sit; in faith and love and hope claim your place by My side; and your heart shall be untroubled, neither shall it be afraid.

> How happy are the little flock,
> Who, safe beneath their guardian Rock,
> In all commotions rest!
> When war's and tumult's waves run high,
> Unmoved above the storm they lie;
> They lodge in Jesu's breast.

It has been said that no class reveals so tranquil a temper as astronomers do. Close observers declare that of all men they are most equal and serene. It is easy to imagine that this should be so. Habitually dwelling in the heavens, thinking God's thoughts in the mighty constellations, familiar with infinity and eternity, no wonder that a majestic quietness distinguishes them from other men. To us who awake out of nothingness the morning newspaper may be replete with agitating items, but its most stirring and dramatic paragraphs will hardly flurry the midnight watcher awed by the vastness of the heavens and the mystery of the stars. How much more will the saint "made higher than the heavens" be oblivious of earthly annoyances and catastrophes, and live in tumultuous scenes with a placid temper! Walk out of the great chapters of revelation into daily life, and you will be astonished at the strength and peace which garrison your soul.

XXVII

DEFERRED BLESSING

And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.—JOEL ii. 25.

IT is not necessary to regard the text as expressing a miraculous intervention of God in the order of nature, for that order already permits and provides for the restoration of withheld blessings. Specially severe or unseasonable weather in one season, destroying wild life on an unusual scale in animal or plant, will very probably secure compensation in the succeeding season; the repression of birds, beasts, reptiles, or fishes is followed by what naturalists have called a "bumper season." The failure of fruit in one autumn leaves a handsome balance to the good in unexhausted energies of plant or tree. A peasant having nothing else to complain about, complained of the abundant harvest because "it took such a power out of the earth"; he might have consoled himself by the fact that a deficient harvest leaves such a power in the earth—a power that in another season will not fail to realize itself. If lean years follow fat years, fat years follow lean ones. In mysterious ways unused forces are treasured, and years are restored that the caterpillar wasted.

Bemoaning unprofitable years of worldliness and sin, we may find consolation in the text. Let us not be afraid to say this. It is ever right and best that we love and serve God in the morning of life, but such an admission does not exclude the truth that the grace of God secures to penitent men forfeited blessing. It is not altogether true that the past is irrevocable; there is truth in the solemn admonition, but, as so often in peremptory axioms, not the whole truth. "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." Retarded gifts may break forth ultimately with unusual energy and effectiveness, as late-flowering plants sometimes bear uncommonly splendid blossoms. We all know how the sense of unprofitable years has spurred adult converts to an all-conquering intensity and enthusiasm in the time that remains; and we have often seen how the extraordinary grace of God granted to a late repentance has infused into the transformed character surpassing strength and beauty.

The curious fact has recently been noticed in the south of France that the lilac-trees whose leaves have all dropped from green-fly or other pests bloom earlier and better than any others. There seems to be some link between the destruction of the leaves and the unexpected crop of flowers. No horticulturist would therefore voluntarily infect his orchards with blight, nor will he shut his eyes to the strange benign processes by which evil is limited and compensated. Human life does not permit presumption, but we may never forget that the mystery of love is profounder even than the mystery of iniquity, and that the virtue of grace triumphs over the worst ravages of sin. St. Paul's

early years were devoured by the caterpillar, yet, through the mercy at which the apostle never ceased to wonder, the stripped branches became purple with blossom and golden with fruit beyond all the trees of the garden. The penitent is in danger of being paralyzed by the clamour of the sins of past years, and of losing all heart and hope when he broods over what he has rejected, wasted, and perverted; still, he may take courage at the thought of the mercy wider than the sea, of the power that can cause stems and boughs blasted by the palmer-worm to blossom as the rose.

The mysterious action of divine providence may restore what has been wasted by the specially bitter and barren seasons of life. We must not despair when frost turns the green leaf black, nor when the locust devours it. Many get a bad start in life. Owing to various causes the morning sunshine is darkened, and the season that ought to be only gay is embittered and blighted by poverty, unkindness, sickness, and injustice. The lives of many little children are terrible. Miss Martineau complained that her life had "no spring." Sad loss, indeed! No snowdrop or violet; no primrose, cowslip, or daffodil; the tender leaf frost-bitten; the singing birds dead in the snow. But God can more than restore a lost spring in a sweet summer, a gracious autumn, a kindly winter. The dutiful child emerges out of premature trial only strengthened by it, and specially qualified because of the dark background to enjoy the bright things which God hath prepared for them who love Him. One of the pictures in the north gallery at Kew represents the

snowflower of California. Of an intense crimson colour, and very large and tall, it is a beautiful flower; it is called the "snow-plant" because it springs directly out of the snow, and is most striking and handsome growing out of it. Thus many of the brightest Christians and most distinguished men in society commenced life in the harshest conditions, spent their youth in the most cruel environments, and yet bourgeoned into gold and purple through many years of prosperity and honour.

Then, again, what we may call the apprenticeship of life is to many deserving young persons bitterly disappointing and exquisitely painful. The brilliant hopes of earlier youth soon drop as blighted blossoms. The literary aspirant is chilled by harsh criticism, the artist's pictures are curtly rejected, the lawyer remains briefless, the physician waits in vain for patients, the preacher's sermons are not well received, and the young shopkeeper is disheartened by multiplied difficulties: these early years of one's career are often peculiarly humiliating and distressing. Yet let none despair, for rich ultimate blessing may come out of and atone for weary and apparently wasted days. Much has been heard lately about flowers being retarded by a cold process; that they may flower when desired, they are kept for a while in an ice-house at a temperature somewhere near zero, but this severe treatment does them no damage: on the contrary, when they are removed from the ice-house and deposited in a warm place they begin to sprout up with greater rapidity for the delay, they are more impervious to unpropitious conditions, and lilacs, laburnums, lilies,

azaleas, and the rest are exhibited and crowned for their exceptional splendour.

By the providence of God, the delays and postponements of human fortune may be similarly recompensed; the years that the caterpillar wasted, that the frost retarded, are restored in fairer, mellower fruit. And all this is just as true of mysterious failure and barrenness in our intellectual and spiritual culture. There are times when all effort seems abortive, and all progress suspended in the higher life; yet be certain such honest endeavour will tell later. Alfred Stevens says: "If you have unexpectedly done well, attribute your success to the effect of previous study." All faithful striving leaves a balance of unexpended force in the brain and heart which one day will delightfully surprise us as though it were an immediate heavenly inspiration. Let not young or old despair. Disappointment often means in the end overflowing vats, and this issue recurs too often to allow us to believe that it belongs to the chapter of accidents. Throughout life we must hesitate to interpret discouragements into final and absolute defeats. The light, the rain, the dew of God work wonders; the locust shall be followed by the butterfly and bee and bird, the song of the vintage and the shout of Harvest Home. God may restore to us what the caterpillar wasted, as He did to Job.

Is there not a truth in the text touching the future life? The whole of this mortal career wears to many the character of complete failure, locusts mar it beyond the possibility of any present redemption; it is a record of unrealized gifts, unfulfilled desires, vain strivings,

unreached ideals; it never comes to fruition, for hateful swarms devour it. Does not the hope of a future world come in here? Such was the thought of Paul, and the truer and purer our heart the more clearly this hope glows in it. The years wasted here by the locust and palmer-worm shall burst out in rare fruitions in the glory everlasting. The leaf consumed by the pitiless caterpillar is converted into splendid satin; a parable, let us say, of the mysterious processes by which care, sickness, loss, toil, suffering, and death—God's sombre alchemists—transmute the green but fading leaves of earth's glory and joy into the enduring felicities and splendours of a higher sphere and a grander life. Let us then in the days of deepest failure and distress be true to God and ourselves. Conan Doyle justly observes: "The highest morality may prove also to be the highest wisdom when the half-told story comes to be finished." This life is "the half-told story." Let us confidently wait for the other half in the heavenly places, and it will entirely justify our faith and patience. "And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed."

XXVIII

THE FATUITY OF RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE

But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise.—MATT. xxii. 5.

THE imagery of this parable is simple, yet its teaching is large indeed. Our Lord here announces that in the fullness of the times God has called the race to fellowship with Himself; that He has provided richly for its satisfaction and perfecting; that He has opened to it a great prospect of eternal life and blessedness. And just as distinctly He teaches that the whole of this divine purpose, so full of grandeur and graciousness, is to be realized in Himself.

The invitation of the king was differently received: in one case the invited maltreated the royal messengers and slew them, whilst others who were called made light of the whole thing. Thus in all generations is the message of God treated—some scorning it with anger and contempt, whilst others simply ignore it. Of this latter class, who tranquilly put aside the message of Christ, we now speak. Much of this levity toward religion is found in the spirit of our age. In the literary world we have examples of this. Renan

in France was long a representative of this bantering spirit. He calls religion "the romance of the infinite." God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, soul, conscience, eternity, heaven, and hell are thrilling episodes in a gigantic fiction, shadows which come and go at the beck of priestly magicians. The same spirit is displayed in English literature. Well-known writers who have little sympathy with supernaturalism have nothing bitter to say against religious faith; they rather discuss it as an innocent and beautiful phase of thought that we ought not willingly to let die. They treat it as one of the fine arts. It is the inspiration of poetry; it may find moving expression in oratorios; it provides admirable dramatic spectacles; it is replete with fine themes for artists. Others pleasantly dismiss religion as a useful illusion. Lecky calls it "the romance of the poor." It is a pleasant dream, perhaps even a useful dream, yet only a dream. The Bible is characterized as a collection of "the fairy stories of God." Pretty phrase! Students of a different taste or temper would denounce it as a fraud, a superstition, a scandal; but to the gay spirits who have not seriousness enough to be angry it is a myth, a romance, a story of pathos and beauty. They make light of it. Agnosticism elevates indifference into a philosophy and a religion.

The same levity is more conspicuous still in actual life; thousands treat the gospel as though it were a romance, yet they would shrink from calling it one. Science!—that touches us. We listen with eagerness and admiration; we are curious and sympathetic; the subject is full of fascination. Politics!—here our preferences and antipathies are at once evoked; we ap-

plaud, we hiss, our friends are concerned lest party spirit should betray us into indiscretion. Commerce! —we are instantly all eye and ear. Amusement!—our face shines, our heart beats, our tongue is loosed. But our interest in religion is faint indeed; it is a subject that does not charm or agitate in the least; many a romance stirs us more deeply.

This mood of levity is altogether *unreasonable.* How profoundly serious was Jesus Christ! He was so engrossed by the sense of God, the things of the spirit, the claims of eternity, that He had little to say about anything else. He who asked the question, "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose himself?" ever lived and taught, feeling the transcendent importance of the spiritual state and destiny. And are not His doctrines supremely significant? Sin is no indifferent matter, no light thing. Not only is the awful fact of disobedience emphasized in revelation; in the tragedies of Shakespeare, in the poetry of Burns, as well as in our own hours of deepest thought, are the reality and seriousness of iniquity brought into the light. The doctrine of grace, revealing the secret of peace with God, is no negligible matter. And the relation of this world to the eternal state is surely a question calculated to inspire solicitude. The Incarnation; Christ's pure teachings, searching appeals, solemn warnings, and glorious promises; His noble life, His bloody sweat and passion, His death on the tree, His resurrection and ascension, and His coming in judgment, all these are solemn matters entitled to be laid to heart, and to be pondered by night and day. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Nazareth, Olivet, Gethsemane, Calvary, Pentecost! The great problems of life were stated here as never before; they were solved here as never before.

And, counting these things lightly, what do we reckon serious? Speaking of this human life, Renan said: "There is nothing serious at the bottom." Well, if things are not serious at the bottom, they must be serious at the top. If they are not serious in the depths, where the consciousness of God is, where the light of eternity breaks forth, where the infinite strivings and fearings are, then the seriousness must be on the surface where the beans and bacon are, the dressing and undressing, the huckstering and bill-sticking, the dust and ashes. And this is the sting of the text—it condemns the invited because they turn from the King and His love, from the eternal kingdom and its glory, to farms and merchandise; in other words, it condemns us because we renounce the divine, the spiritual, the eternal, and count the animal life the only serious thing. It is irrational. We ought to listen to our deepest nature, and if we do we shall listen to Jesus Christ.

The mood of levity is a *guilty* mood. There is no merit whatever in treating religion lightly rather than offensively, although some persuade themselves that there is. They think their polite treatment of religion a considerable justification. They do not stone the messengers, they are courteous, they merely put the invitation into the waste-paper basket, and compliment themselves on their reticence and taste. No, we are not acquitted when we have dismissed Christ politely. There is no greater sin than to make light of religion—

to reduce it to a mere matter of taste, curiosity, or convenience. "Between the poet who dreams, and the faithful who believes, there is a whole abyss." Yes, the abyss of which our Lord speaks in the parables of Dives and Lazarus. What can more emphatically indicate character and provoke damnation than that we should treat revelation as a romance, the house of God as an opera-house, religion as a curious speculation, and that we should turn from the mighty truths of the Christian creed to eat, drink, and play!

How bitter was the spirit that expressed itself in the imprecation, "Crush the wretch!" Renan never spoke thus brutally. He turned the miracles of revelation into myths, its teachings into poems, and in elegant phrases peeled the Saviour of every shred of reality and divine glory; by sophistry and epigram he made of the Cross an intellectual plaything: but he was never rude. How much better is Renan than Voltaire? As much as the kiss of Judas is better than the blow of the Roman soldier. We have civilly dismissed the appeal of God in Christ, that is all, and it is enough. "*None* of these men shall taste of my supper."

The mood of levity is specially *hopeless*. The frivolous are the last to be reached. After visiting many cities Paul came to Athens, and preached with uncommon eloquence. Nowhere did he fail more completely. The Athenians were talkative, flippant, curious, vain, and the apostle made no impression upon them. As Dr. Stalker observes: "He quitted Athens, and never returned to it. Nowhere else has he so completely failed. His message roused neither interest nor opposition. The Athenians never thought

of persecuting him; they simply did not care what the babbler said. This cold disdain cut him more than the stones of the mob or the lictors' rods." He who had more or less success in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome, failed in Athens. Any hearer may be reached sooner than he who treats religion with placid tolerance, diseased indifference, or complaisant nonchalance.

XXIX

THE SLEEPING SICKNESS

It is high time for you to awake out of sleep.—Rom. xiii. 11.

INSOMNIA is considered a modern malady. So intense is the strain of life that we become nervous and restless; we resemble a piano after a railway journey, and anything like healthy repose is out of the question. We may lay our head on the pillow; but, unstrung and morbid, we toss to and fro through the hours of darkness, and in the end not improbably are driven to sleeping draughts to secure the slumber we cannot otherwise woo. But the natives of Africa are afflicted with an exactly opposite malady; attacked by overpowering drowsiness it is impossible to keep the patients awake, they sleep on through days and weeks, and to many of them the stupor proves the sleep of death.

The plague of physical sleeping sickness is rare amongst our countrymen, but other forms of it are familiar enough. There is a political and economical apathy. Not long ago one of our princes recently returned from foreign travel produced a great sensation by calling upon England to "wake up." He had become aware that his countrymen were yielding to a spirit of complacency and self-indulgence, and that

other nations were outstripping us in intelligence and enterprise. Dozing on the couch we were in peril of being eclipsed. He conjured us to arouse ourselves, to get the mist out of our eyes, the haziness out of our brain, the torpor out of our limbs, to appraise facts at their just value, and see to it that we did not suffer an international competition. The sleeping giant must bestir himself ere he is shorn of the locks of his strength. Intellectual apathy sometimes afflicts us. Robert Louis Stevenson, writing to a friend, complains: "You cannot sleep; well, I can best explain my state thus: I cannot wake." Mentally he was at the opposite pole to insomnia; troubled by a nervous lethargy, an unwholesome somnolence, his head and eyes, intellectually speaking, were heavy, and he was unable to do justice to his genius. Most orators, artists, and poets are overtaken at times by this mental stupor. They cannot see strongly; their faculty is not entirely alert; their touch lacks sureness and delicacy, and they are conscious that in consequence of this sluggishness of the brain their work misses the magic of perfect art.

Yet, is not the spiritually-minded man most conscious of this fatal infirmity of sleep? Soporifics produce confusion and illusion, yet in such times of partial insensibility devout men have a sense of uneasiness that they are not at their best, that they are not realizing anything like the power and pleasure of their high calling. Looking on God's glorious world we are haunted by a conviction that we ought to descry more in it than we do. Reading His Word, with all our sense of delight in its infinite meaning and preciousness there mingles a feeling of distress that we appre-

hend it only faintly, as a student who nods over a masterpiece. In the sanctuary we struggle with dullness and are constrained to confess, God is in this place, and I know it not as I ought to know. And in daily life our heart is continually condemning us, because, whilst we watch the mechanism of the divine government, we only by fits and starts catch bare glimpses of the Spirit in the midst of the wheels. Yes; a great spiritual universe infolds us—this we know, of this we are as sure as we are of the existence of the tangible sphere—yet such is the apathy of the interior sense that we cannot get steady sight of eternal realities and delight ourselves in the discovery. We grope in worlds unrealized, and more cannot truthfully be said of us. A "half-awakened child of man" is the poet's portrait of us, and it is true. Tantalizing and humiliating situation! To be mastered by bodily sleep when strong reasons urge us to remain alert, to be thus caught and buffeted between the mind and the body, is a miserable dilemma in which we sometimes find ourselves; and this nebulous and perplexing state very closely represents the unhappy condition of our spiritual life. We are cursed with the sleeping sickness of the soul; our organ of spiritual vision catches only stray gleams of the mystic effulgence hailed by prophets and poets, saints and seers; the light that is in us is darkness. We are like a bulb stirring in the dark, yet unable to flower; like a bird agitated by an instinct of the sky, yet imprisoned in the shell; like a sleeper whose eyes troubled by the morning are yet withheld by nightmare. Shakespeare tells of superb music filling the universe—

> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.

Physical restrictions, the opacity of the senses, the infirmity of a yet undisciplined mind, conceal from us rarer aspects and harmonies of the world, and herein we are not greatly to blame; but, unless we fabricate it for ourselves, no muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close us in, and make us blind and deaf to the Holiest in the height and to the ineffable beauty and music of His presence. The muddiness of soul which forbids us penetrating to the other side is a guilty stupefaction, and of this we are more or less conscious.

Some Christian disciples have the added pang that they are less sensitive to the presence and stimulation of a higher world than they once were. Addressing the Birmingham University, Sir Oliver Lodge declared that, "The average schoolboy of to-day was ignorant. The eager and inquiring child had by some process been turned, or had turned himself, into the intellectually dull, apathetic, indolent professional schoolboy." Has not a somewhat similar but far sadder transformation taken place in some of us? It is ever a mournful thing that the process of years should spoil the freshness of our intellectual life, quench its poetry, silence its curiosity, and degrade it to coarse issues; but it is infinitely more melancholy when we permit our contact with the world to cloud the visions and ideals of the soul, and to rob us of that sensitiveness and aspiration of our religious childhood which gave us entrance into the kingdom of God.

To become awake to the over-world and greater life is largely a question of personal sincerity and

decision. Dr. Adam Clarke, the commentator, was well known as an early riser. A young preacher regretted his inability to follow the doctor's example, and was anxious to know the secret of his success. "Do you pray about it?" inquired the youth. "No," was the reply; "I get up." Sincerity and purpose have also much to do with shaking off the slumber of the soul. If we would direct our mind to the greater life as assiduously as we woo the passive condition, we should soon be open-eyed to heavenly sights. Men rise early in the morning because they yield place and play to larger motives than sensual sloth and indulgence; and if we allow the great thoughts and motives of eternity permanent place in our mind and heart, no drowsiness of indifference shall steal over us, nor stupor of materialism betray us, nor intoxication of pride or pleasure lull us to fatal sleep. Are we really persuaded of the imperativeness of the spiritual life? Do we give the highest things daily opportunity to occupy, fascinate, enthuse us, and to grow upon us in majesty and desirableness? Sleepers awake when they really wish to awake.

To become fully alive to the greater life is to be on our guard against the lower life. "Let us cast off the works of darkness." "Let us walk honestly as in the day." Study these verses. How can we awake if we go on dosing ourselves with narcotics! If we permit the breath of impurity to tarnish our imagination, the pure light of heaven will not shine through it; if we abide in a sandstorm of worldliness, we forfeit the stars; if we surrender to dreams of ambition, greed, and appetite, the purple dawn of the everlasting day

breaks upon us in vain. Oh, for power to awake! Lord, that I might awake! "Now, Peter and they that were with Him were heavy with sleep; but when they were fully awake they saw His glory." Alas for us if we give place to indolence and insensibility! "Lest when He cometh He findeth them sleeping." The Greek general, finding a sentinel asleep at his post, plunged a dagger into his heart, protesting: "I found you asleep, and I leave you so."

Lord, wake me up; rend swift my coffin-planks;
I pray Thee, let me live—alive and free.

XXX

THE EFFICACY OF JOY

To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.—Hab. iii. 19.

SCHOPENHAUER disliked the Jews because they were optimistic, and, if optimism is a fault, not without reason. A celebrated German physician used to pursue his studies through the night with a couple of skeletons holding the candles; it is very patent that the psalms and prophecies of the Old Testament were not written in any such ghastly environment and atmosphere. Despair with the sexton's lamp did not make the darkness visible to Moses, David, and Isaiah; in the light of Hope's torch they construed the blackest problems, and dedicated tragedy and dirge to the chief singer on the stringed instruments. And if hope and cheerfulness characterize the contents of the Old Testament, an intenser peace breathes in the doctrines of the New. No longer are dark themes relieved by torchlight; they are softened and solved in the golden light of a heavenly day. At the heart of revelation throbs a mighty blessedness and hope.

This optimism is justified by our deepest instinct and philosophy. Human consciousness bears witness that the profoundest thing in the universe is the thing whose essence is purity and whose expression is beauty

and peace. We naturally, that is necessarily, believe in gladness as we do in freedom. The world is neither clear nor dark, and therefore intellectual men debate as to whether it is a wedding-robe with a crape hem, or a shroud with an embroidered border; but the unsophisticated discern that its warp and woof are threads of gold throughout, only mysteriously rent and blotted. The fundamental principles of nature and life are truth and love, happiness and hope. Many lurid clouds threaten us, yet after all the blue sky is the main thing, not the blue lightning; the sky is more than all clouds; and, indeed, we should not know that the storm was black had we not first known that the sky was blue; for, as Shakespeare puts it—

> The more fair and crystal is the sky,
> The uglier seem the clouds that in it fly.

Reeking pools, slimy marshes, and muddy rivers defile the landscape; but the crystal sea is the grand feature of the planet, and its infinite purity and beauty show how limited and exceptional foulness is. We grope in deep shadows and gloomy places, yet is the shining sun the sovereign reality; there are dark suns, and if our central orb had been one of these in vain should we have kindled sparks; but a sight of our sun makes us smile at the blackest night and the bitterest winter. Our God is "the happy God"; the central universe is one of light and music; the core and ideal of things are truth, beauty, and peace; and the partial blemishes and disorders which distress us shall not destroy our faith and joy. The pessimist may industriously stir his puddle, but we console ourselves with the Atlantic;

he may exaggerate the thunder-cloud, but we soothe ourselves with the eternal azure; with Calaban he may shudder in the eclipse, but we warm ourselves in the sun that shall no more go down. And if instinct and philosophy justify a happy soul, much more is that true of revelation, as already hinted.

Joyfulness has never been the ideal of the Christian world, nor is it now. The mass of godly people feel that there is something malefic in humour, that laughter partakes of the nature of sin, and a snore in a congregation is more easily condoned than a smile. An ancient law banished roses from Jerusalem, and that law is considerably in force in the Christian church. Seriousness is always thought to be much nearer akin to melancholy than to mirth. All of which is a serious misconception. Robert Louis Stevenson uttered a really profound truth when he wrote: "To be happy is the first step to being pious." It would be a grand thing indeed if the godly could finally rid themselves of the superstition of sadness, and show the world the virtue of Christianity in bringing to perfection all the elements of gaiety which beautify the soul and life. The Christian world has never yet mustered courage to let itself go; it has never given free expression to the mighty gladness which stirs its heart. Herein it has seriously discredited its faith. Whatever, notwithstanding, may have been the mistake of the Church, the gospel is full of the spirit and power of holy gladness, and once grant it free course it will express itself in every jubilant form and accent. Our Lord Himself is "the chief singer" who, on the rudest of instruments, has harmonized the discords of the world,

and who imparts the secret of melody and mirth to all who can receive it.

Joyfulness of spirit is most efficacious as against temptation and sin. The Greek had a happy creed, but that creed chiefly contemplated intellectual and sensational pleasure, and it rather fostered selfish and sensual indulgence. The Christian creed is also happy, but with happiness of another order, and going far deeper; first concerning itself with the soundness of the heart, and contemplating chiefly the noble pleasure of unselfish and righteous conduct; and thus becoming a splendid safeguard against illegal enjoyment of every kind. A simple joyous Christian heart instinctively shrinks from selfish sensual indulgence; and just as instinctively it regulates all legitimate delights and solicitations of a subordinate order. There is wonderful preservative virtue in true joy; it may to a superficial glance seem altogether too poetic to be trusted with serious interest, yet it is the very key of our defence and salvation. The New Testament confides the most serious interests and consequences to apparently the slenderest guarantees. Thankfulness may be counted a flimsy sentiment, yet when the Apostle Paul imputes the enormities of the Gentile world to the lack of it we perceive its immense significance in regard to character and destiny. Mild peace masks military mastery of the first order, for it garrisons the heart. But the practical love is reckoned a frail emotion, yet on that tenuous thread Heaven suspends universal virtue. And the all-conquering strength which vanquishes world, flesh, and devil is a mystic thrill known as "the joy of the Lord." True delight in God is not

weak, for it combines within itself all the strength of the intellect, all the vigour of the will, all the invincibleness of the affections; it is the very health, power, and perfection of the soul; and we are never safer from sin than when a holy joy sparkles in our eyes and vibrates on our tongue.

Joyfulness is the availing specific against sorrow. A thoroughgoing realization of the bright things and seasons of life is the best preparation for the dark days, and no one is fortified against the dark days who has not fully enjoyed the bright ones. The summer flowers which survive through the autumn bear the chills of approaching winter much better than the flowers of autumn do; the summer flowers drenched in the long sunshine have a fuller vitality than the autumn blooms which enjoyed only the fainter light of the shorter day, and the favoured children of the sun best brave the gathering cold and darkness. So men best sustain the trying seasons of life who enjoyed most heartily its privileged hours, who stood well out of the shade, and drank in at every pore the golden sunshine of life's summer days. If happy days are vouchsafed, raise your vitality to the highest by their full enjoyment. If threatened by misfortune, confront it as Habakkuk did, with a trustful song. If tribulation overtakes you, disperse or sanctify it in the power of a smiling confidence and holy joy. As the Orientals put it: "By dint of laughing the roses are opened." They who come to Zion with songs "obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing flee away."

Joyfulness is the best inspiration for obedience and service. "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before

His presence with singing." Only as we attain to gladness are duty, work, suffering, and sacrifice accomplished at their best. Leonardo da Vinci painted, they say, holding a lyre in one hand; and everybody knows that he painted superbly. Holding a lyre in our hand, paths of duty bloom into paths of primroses: holding a lyre in our hand, whatever work is done by the other hand is a masterpiece; holding a lyre in our hand, the sacrifice is forgotten in the garlands; holding a lyre in our hand, the sponge dipped in vinegar changes to a honeycomb.

XXXI

A HUMAN DOCUMENT

Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.—LAM. iii. 39, 40.

THE natural man resents his afflictions. He is ever asking, Why do I suffer? Why do I suffer thus? He regards his sufferings as partaking of the nature of injustice; he considers himself the victim of misfortune, rather than the subject of correction. Enlightened men know better than this; they recognize an element of justice in their tribulation, and know within themselves how little reason they have to complain.

Whenever we are brought to the right point of view, we are in some sense penitents. We no longer argue as though we were innocent and meritorious, but underlying all our reasonings and conclusions is the consciousness of personal fault and demerit. The self-righteous and self-satisfied are astonished when brought into deep waters; it is an experience entirely out of harmony with their complacent mood; but when under the stress of inward or outward trouble we "search and try our ways," we are not surprised by anything we suffer. And testing our life in the light of the holy

law we do not construe trial as though it were an unlucky accident, but we accept it as partaking of the nature of chastisement and retribution. In Oscar Wilde's pathetic prison book, which has recently excited much attention, we read: "The fact of my having been the common prisoner of a common jail I must frankly accept, and, curious as it may seem, one of the things I shall have to teach myself is not to be ashamed of it. I must accept it as a punishment, and if one is ashamed of having been punished one might just as well never have been punished at all. Of course, there are many things of which I was convicted that I had not done; but, then, there are many things of which I was convicted that I had done, and a still greater number of things in my life for which I was never indicted at all. . . . I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand. I am quite ready to say so. This pitiless indictment I bring without pity against myself. Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still." With similar reproaches are the afflicted souls of the awakened ever filled as they remind themselves of the sins of past years. And this sense of personal unworthiness checks all complaining; makes the penitent indeed thankful for bitter things which the carnal bemoan.

Not only do the enlightened detect in their sufferings the working of a general law of retribution, but they can often trace the connexion between their humiliations and sufferings and their specific personal sinfulness. "A man for the punishment of *his* sins." We may be fully assured that there is exquisite exact-

ness and discrimination in the working of the law of retribution as in the action of all divine law; it does sometimes appear as though the law of retribution were peculiarly blind and sweeping, but truly the wheels which graze or grind are full of eyes, and exquisite justice regulates their every movement. The Harvard Astronomical Observatory at Cambridge, Massachusetts, recently secured the first successful photograph of a spectrum of lightning, the astronomer thus being able to analyze the fire of the tempest, and to determine what elements enter into its composition: subsequently several excellent photographs of lightning flashes were taken, and a later study of their spectra brought out the interesting fact that they were not exactly similar. We are morally certain that if, in some similar manner, it were possible to analyze the judgments of God, to enter into their causes, elements, and workings, we should find wise and delicate differentiations. As one lightning flash differs in character from another, so there is ever something personal and unique in the tribulations by which the Father of spirits disciplines His children.

The sensitive soul often discerns the subtle relation between its sin and punishment. Others may not at all understand the relation; they may not suspect it, but the godly know why their Father has taken them to task, and they see the personal significance of their trial. To none living may they, perhaps, speak of it; yet they can hardly be mistaken as they trace the obscure connexion between the faults of which they know themselves guilty, and what, to others, appear causeless and purposeless sorrows. In this respect

the heart knows its own bitterness. We make the greatest and most painful mistakes when we gratuitously undertake to give reasons for the afflictions of our neighbours, as Job's friends did; but to find the reason for our private sorrow in our personal sin is a humbling task for which we are often sorrowfully qualified.

The truly enlightened do not complain, because they apprehend sharply that their punishment is less than their desert. "Wherefore doth a *living* man complain?" The fact that we are alive is immediate and sufficient evidence of the divine forbearance. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." All this the humbled soul is made to understand, and to lay to heart. Where is the reasonableness of complaint when the just and extreme sentence has not been executed? He who has been excused a plank bed does not fret at a crumpled rose-leaf. He who has escaped the gallows does not murmur at the tread-mill. He who is pardoned the hemlock-cup does not resent the wormwood and the gall. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." No, the truly enlightened man does not complain of the punishment of his sins; what troubles him far more are the sins that go unpunished. The sense of chastisement gives inward relief; but the secret distress of many is that, whilst others are being bitterly and openly punished, they have escaped detec-

tion and judgment—nay, that they continue to be honoured and blessed in a thousand ways. This is the fact that keenly troubles most noble yet erring souls. Let us, however, leave all our sins with Him who abundantly pardons. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens."

XXXII

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE DISAGREEABLE

So then am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?—GAL. iv. 16.

NOT long ago we had a most dismal summer season, and the papers reported that it witnessed a record pawning of barometers. People got depressed by looking at the face of the instrument, the hand of which invariably indicated a continuance of unsettled weather. So when money ran short, and it was found necessary to part with something, the barometer was the first item to be selected. Some pawnbrokers, it was said, had such a glut in these pledges that they declined to advance money on any more. This funny episode in the human comedy condenses into a quaint image an undeniable feature of our poor nature—an impatience with whatever thrusts upon us unwelcome truth.

International criticism is usually resented and retorted. In a speech at Calcutta University Lord Curzon treated the native students to some plain speaking about the besetting Oriental tendency to take liberties with the truth. This was more than the self-love of the Bengali could bear, and forthwith the native news-

papers teemed with invective; no sooner did the quicksilver fall than the barometer lost its popularity. The Cretans would not prize the native instrument whose index finger fastened on their national failing, nor would the apostle have been popular who gave his testimony to its verdict. And this is the usual consequence of international candour.

Not long ago a distinguished Metropolitan minister suggested that a section of the working classes was specially lacking in industry, temperance, and godliness; the impeachment was promptly and indignantly resented, stones were thrown, and the barometer came near to being smashed. If the rich do not with equal demonstration repudiate criticism, it must be owing to the fact that long ago they sent the steadily unflattering glass to the pawnbroker, supposing they ever dispose of things in that quarter. The various religious denominations do not relish neighbourly analysis and advice. And so far as concerns the individual, to see ourselves as others see us is rarely reckoned a privilege. We are usually hugely offended when our personal defects in grammar, pronunciation, manners, or matters of similar import are corrected; and the annoyance is yet more intense when the deeper imperfections of our character are challenged. Few can bear with anything like good nature any hint of their serious infirmities.

We decline practically to listen to our friends. "Am I become your enemy, because I deal truly with you?" The Galatians received the apostle as an angel of God when he came with a general message of grace; yet he no sooner ventured to remonstrate with them on

account of their error and prejudice than they harshly withstood him. Whilst our friends administer syrups, they charm; but we suspect their species the moment we catch the smatch of a tonic in their intercourse. And with most of us it is entirely out of the question that we should be willing to be taught by our enemy. The excuses tendered for resenting criticism are amusingly ingenious and sophistical. The suggestion of our fault was unseasonable; the spirit in which it was made was not nice; our alleged failing was exaggerated; the critic ought first to have taken the beam out of his own eye. By a thousand transparent demurs we rob ourselves of the benefit of current personal admonition.

Are we not extremely inconsistent and foolish in this touchiness and resentment? We are not irritable after this sort if there is any chance of the removal of blemishes in our personal appearance of bodily health. We treat handsomely the artist who frees us from a wart, smooths out a wrinkle, or refines away a mole or freckle; the physician who puts his finger on the spot and testifies, "Thou ailest here and here," excites gratitude, not anger; why, then, should we turn away with wounded pride and displeasure from any mirror which presumes to throw back upon us reflections of our moral self? It is quite true that critics sometimes do us scant justice. The Japanese have metal mirrors with properties which ordinary looking-glasses do not possess; on the back of the metal is a figure which, owing to the process of polishing, is reflected on anything when the sun shines upon the surface of the mirror. So our critics do not always reflect our true

likeness, but a perverse image they have formed of us at the back of their mind. If this is so, it is to our advantage. If faithfully we satisfy ourselves that the impeaching mirrors are not true, so much the better; but if they are true, how irrational it is to banish them. Even when the truth is urged upon us unseasonably, tactlessly, or harshly, we are not the less interested in it. Emerson says: "The wise man throws himself on the side of his assailants. It is more his interest than it is theirs to find his weak point." The discipline of the disagreeable is far too precious to be rejected. In some of the training colleges for Roman Catholic priests it is said to be a rule to force the novices to practise the particular things they most dislike; and many of us would be all the better were we to practise the particular duties we most resent, and to listen impatiently to the sermons we find most distasteful.

Few suffer more seriously or manifestly in temper and character than do the men and women who, for one reason or another, are exempt from frank, candid, honest criticism; their privileged lot is really cruel in the extreme. To pawn the barometer or to banish the mirror is gratuitously to deliver ourselves up to foolish and fatal notions. We go to church and listen to large, eloquent discourses which by no accident touch our personal weaknesses, and we come away little the better for the splendid oration; but those faithful personal and domestic criticisms which are all application may prove infinitely more to our advantage. The ministry of the disagreeable is a much under-valued means of grace, yet it would often profit more than the golden

mouth and silver tongue of famous pulpits. Let us be willing to know the truth, to admit the light whatever it reveals, to follow the light wherever it leads. No matter how untuned the trumpet, let us obey its warning; no matter how uncouth the gramophone, let us listen to its message; no matter how humbling or painful the witness of mirror or barometer, let us cleanse ourselves from the blemish revealed by the one, and prepare ourselves for the storm foreshadowed by the other.

> Dear is my friend, but my foe too
> Is friendly to my good;
> My friend the thing shows I *can* do,
> My foe, the thing I should.

XXXIII

HUMILITY

Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.—I PETER v. 5, 6.

IN every possible way and at every possible point revelation sets forth the charm and obligation of humility. The New Testament never loses sight of the lovely grace and never fails to extol it. Our Lord, who of this grace was the supreme illustration, most emphatically and repeatedly enjoins it upon His disciples; and Paul, Peter, James and John again and again exhort their brethren to lowliness of mind.

It is an error to regard humility as a separate, definite virtue; it is much rather an attitude and a disposition of the soul. It is the way in which we feel towards God, in which we regard ourselves and our fellows; towards God it implies the sense of reverence and dependence, and towards our fellows, deference, consideration, and helpfulness. Harnack justly remarks: "Humility is not a virtue by itself; but it is pure receptivity, the expression of inner need, the prayer for God's grace and forgiveness—in a word, the opening up of the heart to God"; and united with

this meekness of godliness are the love and service of our neighbour. Humility is an abiding disposition towards the good, and that out of which everything that is good springs and grows. Let us note the conditions which render this grace possible, the elements which constitute it. The primary condition of humility is the consciousness of personal greatness. Secularism is accustomed to inculcate humility by belittling us. Its favourite line of argument is to contrast our weakness and mutability with the vastness, splendour, and permanence of the universe; thus subjecting our pretensions to contempt. But to insist on our abject insignificance is to render humility impossible. There can be no sense of lowliness without the consciousness of loftiness—only greatness can be humble. And if humility requires that we should esteem and minister to our neighbour, it implies that we cherish a high sense of our neighbour's worth and dignity. If, according to the text, we ought to gird ourselves "with humility, to serve one another," it must be because we are persuaded of our common grandeur, and not of our common insignificance. The consequence of gibing at the vanity, impotence, and humiliations of humanity is to induce cynicism, not the meekness which honours and helps our fellows. Our Lord never sought to humble us by caricaturing us, but in His blended majesty and lowliness discovered the nature and secret of humility.

With the consciousness of personal greatness, however, must go the knowledge that our greatness is derived and dependent. The secularist rebukes pride by contrasting our life and lot with the stability and

magnificence of nature, but his method is mistaken. Whatever may be the humiliations of humanity, we are yet conscious of our superiority to dust, however it may be transfigured, or however much there may be of it. Revelation sets us before the face of God; declares His greatness, wisdom, holiness, and love; avouches that we are His offspring, and that we have nothing that we have not received from Him; that He is our King and Judge; and thus our sense of greatness is chastened and hallowed by the vision of supreme and eternal greatness. Abolish God, and there is an end of the humility of men. What authority remains to rebuke rampant arrogance after His fear is removed from before our eyes? Then we are greater than all else; we are absolute masters of the situation; no place is left for gratitude, reverence, or service. Before the face of God seraphim veil their face with their wings; and in the presence of His glory vanity is shamed and abased. Tempted to selfishness, domination, and vaingloriousness, we are humbled "under the mighty hand of God."

Finally, humility is perfected in the consciousness that our greatness is redeemed greatness. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up," is the admonition of St. James. We are called to estimate ourselves in the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Created in honour, and set over the work of God's hands, we have fallen from our high estate, and it is only through sovereign mercy that the dropped crown has been restored to us. How much there is in the gospel of redemption to overwhelm us, to fill us with humility! Everything from

which we have been saved, everything that we possess, everything for which we hope—all is of the free grace of Him who died for us. Well may we with the elders cast our crowns on the jasper pavement at the feet of the Lamb, and ascribe to Him all glory and praise! These are the large considerations which at once preserve our sense of innate greatness, and yet bend us low in humility and adoration.

Lowliness of mind is the ground and condition of all rare excellences. We see this in every direction. The scholar must enter upon his task with modesty and humility if he is to excel; a sense of cleverness and self-sufficiency may easily prevent success. Writing to his son at the University, Sir James Paget remarks: "I am very sorry for the failures at Christ Church of which you tell. I suspect that cleverness was at the bottom of the failure, for it is a character of mind the exercise of which is so instantly and pleasantly rewarded that the temptation to cultivate it is always present, always diminishing the feeling of need to work with better mental powers for better rewards that are far off. Certainly, of all good mental powers cleverness is the most dangerous, unless it can be held down, even with violence, by some better power, and made a lower servant where else it would be master." So the sense of cleverness, of self-sufficiency, robs men of coveted prizes of scholarship. How eloquently Ruskin dwells upon the peril of pride in art and the constant need in the artist of sincerity and simplicity! When Mr. Tylney Wellesley, afterwards fourth Earl of Mornington, was Master of the Mint, he caused a certain number of shillings to be struck, on which

the letters "T. W." were placed on the lower edge of the Sovereign's neck. George IV. found this out, and was extremely angry. So Ruskin warns the artist against the pride of mind and heart that may betray him into introducing his own vain conceits into his pictures; when he ought simply to rejoice in the work of God's hands, and to give Him all the glory by a faithful representation of it. Vanity, conceit, and insolence in the artist will mar his work, however great he may be. The immortal masters forgot themselves in the glory of the world.

And far beyond the blighting effects of pride of heart, or intellect and its achievements, is its fatal influence on the moral life. Meekness, teachableness, responsiveness, are essential to high spiritual excellence. Just as pride is the root of all vices, humility is the ground out of which all moral perfections spring. The structure of the violet is, we believe, the most perfect known to botanists, inasmuch as it possesses all the parts of a plant according to scientific classification, which comparatively few plants possess, whilst many brilliant tropical plants are more or less defective in their organs. As the sweet emblem of humility comprehends all the parts of a plant, so humility itself holds the essence of universal goodness; and he who is clothed with it is perfect, lacking nothing.

The idea that men of marked humility and unselfishness are inept creatures has no foundation in fact. George Sand writes: "Humility of mind is a monkish virtue which God forbids to reformers." It is not so. Meekness was the grand characteristic of our Lord;

it is repeatedly and most touchingly revealed in St. Paul; and, whatever his traducers may say, the humility of Martin Luther was profound. A Turkish proverb well discriminates: "A man is harder than iron, more delicate than the rose." Noble men are ever thus; they have a side of lowliness, softness, condescension, helpfulness, the delicacy and sweetness of the rose; and with this simplicity and gentleness they blend qualities of the utmost strength and steadfastness.

XXXIV

DIFFERENTIATIONS IN EXCELLENCE

The gold of that land is good.—GEN. ii. 12.

PROFOUND students of human nature are most conscious of the complexity of moral character. Analyzing the elements which enter into it they discover sound alloy in base metal. The soul of goodness in things evil is a favourite topic with some critics; and, it may be acknowledged, a legitimate one. It is good to think that pure evil is rare, if, indeed, it is ever met with. But, on the other hand, these assayers of human nature find dross in the most refined metal. Gold is never found pure, and they do not find humanity so. A reviewer writes: "With Thackeray no passion is simple, no motive unmixed. Affection is alloyed with injustice, innocence with selfishness, generosity with folly, love itself with jealousy and calculation." Indeed, good and evil in many instances are so undeniably present and so subtly interfused that the appraiser of character is puzzled by the anagram, and hesitates as to the category to which his ambiguous subject belongs. In California in some cases the more precious metals of silver and gold are found in con-

nexion with copper. The gold in certain places is so largely mixed with the copper that it is a question whether the mine is a poor gold or a rich copper one. Most of us are acquainted with men and women who, concerning their moral qualities, present a similar problem; and many of us are familiar with the same problem in our own heart and life. There is gold and gold, as found it varies immensely in fineness; and even when we may humbly hope that through God's grace we rank with the higher metal, yet are we distressed that so much in our experience and character is mixed and amorphous.

The range of moral excellence is immense. The interval is wide between the ordinary precious stones of the working jeweller and the Cullinan diamond; between the seed pearl and the lustrous drop for the possession of which millionaires contend; between the meagre sparkle of the quartz and the refined gold of the treasury of kings: and this wide scheme of material values is only one illustration of the distance that often obtains between the worst and best of the excellent things of nature. In the intellectual world an all but infinite space divides the good artist in literature, colour, or music from the immortal masters. And the differentiations of moral worth are wider still, although they may not be equally obvious. Only He whose eye sees every precious thing can sum up the gradations, and measure the distance, between "the least in the kingdom of heaven" and the saint who comes nearest to his Master and who is most like Him. A well-known work on ornithology has an illuminated frontispiece, on which are figured the first bird pre-

served in the geological record and the highest bird existent on the earth to-day. The earliest known avine form is the archæopteryx, a creature which was unquestionably during life a feather-clad bird; yet it had only just passed the reptile stage, and still retained many reptilian characteristics—it is altogether a strange, monstrous form. By the side of this primitive creature is a picture of the last and highest type of bird, the bird of paradise—a form on which Heaven has lavished such a wealth of elegance and glory, that when a great living naturalist first beheld it in its native haunts he was so overpowered by its splendour that his heart beat violently and he nearly fainted. Millions of delicate differentiations have lifted the lizard-like original into an organized scrap of rainbow.

This teaching of natural history may remind us of the countless variations, transformations, and phases which crowd the wide interval separating the convert, freshly emerging from the mud of the slough with many gross characteristics yet adhering to him, and the saint, cleansed, disciplined, faultless—quite on the verge of heaven. We think of a man as a converted man, as a good man, and are content with the simple description; yet we must not forget that there is such a thing as comparative goodness, and that innumerable gradations exist among good men. The Scriptures repeatedly recognize these subtle differences in the character, consecration, and service of those who are, nevertheless, all recognized disciples. It is true that He alone who searcheth the hearts and who knoweth the mind of the Spirit is acquainted with the differential calculus of the interior world, the method and

truth of computation in the highest branches of moral life and action, and He only can follow the silent and hidden progressiveness of the soul; but He knows all these secrets, they are written in His book, and they will regulate the final verdict.

It would be rank presumption to attempt to say how far refinement of character may go. In this age we are chary of attempting to define the potentialities of any thing or creature whatever, much less must we venture to place limits to the ennobling of character and life. Who may affirm to what ultrasensitiveness, to what sovereign strength conscience may attain in a fully consecrated life! Just as science has brought timepieces to an almost absolute perfection, then enclosing them in hermetically sealed cases that the mechanism may not be affected by changes of temperature or of atmospheric pressure; so conscience enshrined in, tempered by the Holy Ghost, acquires an almost infallible truth of delicacy. Who may declare the capacity of the human will! Without doubt it may be educated until it enjoys perfect freedom and ineffable delight in executing the behests of the highest righteousness. Who may set a limit to the richness of love, to the power of self-sacrifice, to the sublimity of purity, of which a true heart is susceptible! Who dares to assign a boundary to the power of holiness in practical life! Holy Writ assures us that we may be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and that we may perfect holiness in the fear of God. Have we, then, more faith in the corruption and weakness of human nature than we have in the redeeming and hallowing grace of the Spirit of power and holiness? As already intimated,

great are the possibilities of material things, great are the possibilities of the human mind, and we have seen the folly of fixing arbitrary limits to their capacity of development; but is it not far more glaring presumption to attempt to confine within any narrow lines the unfolding of the moral life? "I have seen an end of all perfection; but Thy commandment is exceeding broad." The infinity of the law argues the infinity of the soul, and its vast possibilities of vision, power, beauty, and blessedness. We do ourselves amazing injustice by qualifying the ideal of human perfection. "The gold of that land is good." Outside the kingdom of God is much auriferous gravel; immediately within its borders is coarse gold; but in its depths alloys, adulterations, and debasements are finally purged, and human nature throughout its structure, manifestations, and experiences has become even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal, or as pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

In the highest reaches of character and action do we taste the ineffable satisfactions of godly life. "The least in the kingdom of heaven" is conscious of unearthly blessedness, but the lower stages of the better life have no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth. The last degrees of perfection in anything mean more than all that went before. The trifling superiority of the historical diamond in size and water give it an altogether disproportionate value; so minute are the excelling perfections of the prize rose that they are inappreciable to an untrained eye; the skimming of the final film of alloy makes poetry of the gold on the fire; it is a fine stroke, a soft touch, a last ethereal grace that constitutes an artistic master-

piece and invests it with fabulous wealth and glory; and it is when purity loses its final specks of dross, when love precipitates its lingering sediment of selfishness, when the scent of pride and vanity is gone, when the thoughts, emotions and motives are ultimately clarified, when life attains to perfect simplicity, sincerity and loftiness, that we enter into the fullness of joy which is beyond all other joy as the flower transcends the leaf. Strive toward these highest ends, follow the "more excellent" way, "that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

XXXV

TRUTH

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. —2 Cor. xiii. 8.

TRUTH is a question of far wider scope than verbal literal accuracy; indeed, the prosaic man who prides himself on rigid accuracy of statement, and upon his habit of calling a spade a spade, is sometimes essentially untruthful. One may be severely precise about dates, numbers, and circumstances, and yet through suppression and bias egregiously misrepresent and discolour the facts of the situation. Much has been written about the photograph as a false witness. The general notion is that a photograph must be, without question, an almost ideal of truthfulness; we feel sure that the sun cannot lie. And yet it has been shown in an ancient-lights case that photographs can be taken of the same site which are mutually contradictory. The photograph is made to speak for this or for that, according to the interests of the parties concerned. The artist has to select his lens, to find the desired standpoint, and to take the picture at the right time of day. By sundry devices walls may be represented as near or far, windows misplaced by a sinister angle, various sections of the premises

magnified into disproportion, and the whole scene confused by lights and shadows cunningly distributed. When the two photographs taken in the interests of the two litigants were brought into court they gave diametrically contradictory witness. Thus although in one sense the camera must be literally accurate, yet in another sense the photograph may seriously lie and mislead. And just as photography, whilst mechanically veracious, may give directly false evidence, so the verbally accurate witness, whilst telling the circumstantial truth in the main, may, through prejudice, pride, or interest, suppress some item or introduce some small and concealed element of falsehood as serves to turn the whole of his testimony on the side of unrightness.

On the other side, it is quite possible for imaginative and emotional people to give the literal truth a certain exaggerated and poetical setting which does not violate the essential truth or mislead. This is so with much of the fiction of Sir Walter Scott; the graphic, romantic presentment bringing home to the reader more forcibly the essential truth of certain historical scenes than could have been done by literal statements and statistics. Turner furnishes a similar illustration in art. Critics of a sort complain of his inaccuracies, and that they fail to recognize in his cities and landscapes the features which are known to distinguish them; but the apologists of the great artist contend for his exceptional truthfulness; he neglects topographical precision, yet the essential characteristics of the scenery are seized and depicted with unerring delicacy and fidelity. It is quite possible to be intensely faithful

and true whilst giving a free and pictorial expression to facts and ideas that others would relate boldly. The glowing utterances of Isaiah and St. John are not less exact than the cold, hard photographs of didactic truths and principles given by Ecclesiastes. This is equally the case with ordinary people in current intercourse. We must allow for differences of temperament and situation, and not suppose that the whole idea of truth is exhausted by a rigorous pedantry. The statue in the public square is not as measured by a foot rule true to life, yet it may most faithfully represent the ideal personality—in other words, the actuality. Not that we design in writing thus to encourage looseness of statement on one side, or a habit of exaggeration on the other; rather our purpose is to show that in the high, broad sense of Scripture truth is no mere technical matter, but a question of inward sincerity and rightness of heart, stamping all that a man is and does with the character of ingenuousness, unreservedness, and trustworthiness. To do nothing against the truth, but for the truth, implies that the spirit of truth is in our heart; that we are not governed by motive of pride or interest, but by the simple passionate love of truth itself; and that we are prepared to make every sacrifice that we may follow it in all its findings. Wide is the scope, various the subjects, and nice the application of truth alike in word and deed; and he alone is faithful to the text who lives in the fear of God, the spirit of Christ, and in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to lead into the whole truth.

In our day the moral sentiment ought to be strongly reinforced by the sanction given to truthfulness both

by nature and by science, which is its interpretation. The exactness and absolute trustworthiness of nature are truisms. A recent writer thus expresses the fact: "Every distinct object is characterized by its own qualities, powers, and appearances, and by them may be distinguished from that which is characterized by different qualities, powers, and appearances. Oxygen has its signs; hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, chlorine, iodine, and phosphorus have their signs. These signs no chemist distrusts; his science is built on them. He works in their midst with confidence; he depends upon them, and is not disappointed. From whatever distance, also, in the heavens a sign comes, it is received without distrust; unlimited faith is placed in it; its truth is never questioned; its message and interpretatation obtain a settled place among the verities of science." Such is the fundamental truth of earth and heaven. And most sincerely, sensitively, and patiently does our science study to interpret faithfully the phenomena of the world. The philosopher approaches his task with an open and inquisitive mind; his theories are drawn from observation and experiment; he works with instruments of marvellous precision; his painstaking, perseverance, and sacrifice often rise to martyrdom; his only passion is to know and exhibit the thing as it is. The veracity of modern science is a grave rebuke to all who attempt to imprint on the facts of life the characters of their own ignorance, partiality, passion and untruthfulness.

Are we not humbled when, leaving the sphere of science, we contemplate the condition of things in commerce, politics, society, and religion? What guile,

feigning, juggling, varnishing, and hypocrisy! How rare is actuality, reality, candour, the supreme love of the truth! Much as we flatter ourselves on our plain truthfulness and honest living, tried by the ideal standard we are yet barbarians. Our mind falls as far short of truth as our character does of beauty. Is there not passing occasion that we should diligently cultivate the truthful spirit and practise it in all directions? In controversy let us not strive for victory, but for illumination; let us not be dominated by party spirit, but by a sense of verity and righteousness; let us be deaf to the pleadings of interest and passion, always giving the forward place to reasonableness and conscience; let us carry into our sects and cliques a love of truth that penetrates at once the sophistries and glamours of falsity and selfishness. Let us be severely true to our own selves; diligently worship God in spirit and in truth; and maintain intimate communion with Him who is the truth and the life. The highest ideal of honesty and veracity is only possible as we cultivate a spirit of meekness, unselfishness, and reverence; as we walk in the light in which there is no darkness at all; and we must refuse to count that religion which does not work out in transparency of thought and purpose, impartiality of judgment, sincerity of demeanour, conversation, and action.

XXXVI

INDIRECTION

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt; but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea.—Exod. xiii. 17, 18.

FOR the reason stated, God did not lead His people by the nearest path to their desired goal, but by a circuitous route and after long delay. Does He not often act thus both with the race at large and with the individual? We may be sure that He never loses sight of the far-off event, that He never falters in His design, and that He can make no mistake as to direction, and yet by endless windings and turnings He seeks to bring His purposes to pass. What a wide sweep He took to prepare the earth for human habitation; not by the short cut of an immediate creation, but by a process of evolution stretching through measureless ages! And when He determined to vouchsafe His creatures a revelation of Himself and of the truths of the eternal universe, He did not once for all issue a direct and summary declaration of His character, laws, and purpose, but worked out the revelation through thousands of years in the crooked history of the chosen nation.

The same principle of circumlocution is being perpetually evidenced in the administration of His government. A recent traveller observes: "What a wonderful thing it is to have arrived at such a perfect knowledge of the currents of air and water, that even on these vast seas one is sure of arriving quicker at any given point, by taking the two sides of a right angle, than by taking the hypothenuse, and more sure of making out the journey to Australia in three months by following a circuitous route than of making it in five if one followed the shortest route traced on a chart." How perfectly this strategy is understood in heaven, and by what labyrinthine marches does God circumvent every opposing force, and bring His designs to fruition!

Does not this fact supply a cue to the apparent confusions of national and individual history? Events seem to lack orderly marshalling, they do not move smoothly, they apparently wander wide of the goal. Providence, if any such rule there be, wears the aspect of indecision and confusion, the action of things suggests tedious see-saw, the route seems lost, and we move as in a maze. If we could only strike "the bee-line" and follow "as the crow flies," we should be delighted; but our course through life is painfully at variance with this natural simplicity. Weary of what we consider the pedantry of the Imperial Government, we contemptuously brand it as "the circumlocution office;" yet if we candidly note the cycles and fluctuations of human affairs, there is more circumlocution in the government of God than in any other government whatever.

Let us, however, be on our guard against impatience "For God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt." The tortuous path of Israel was prescribed out of a tender regard for its safety; and the same wise loving kindness determines the involutions, tangents, and circumnavigations of our pilgrimage. We are conducted "round about" in order to escape hills that are too steep, currents that are too strong, ordeals that are too bitter. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust," and leads us in a safe way because of our enemies. The meandering track we wearily tread irritates us, and excites in our heart cruel thoughts of God; yet if we saw truly, we should glorify the exquisite wisdom and grace which find for us at every step the line of least resistance. Indirection is not misdirection. The way is long, obscure, and apparently arbitrary; but the sufficient reason for all our perplexing wanderings is found in the weakness of our nature and the exigencies of life's discipline.

> He fixed thee 'mid this dance
> Of plastic circumstance,
> This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
> Machinery just meant
> To give thy soul its bent,
> Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

In the sanctification of character the same method of indirection is followed. The ordinary moralist makes a frontal attack on the weaknesses and errors of human nature. He strikes directly and bluntly at the vices of men, concentrating his strength upon exposing, denouncing, and chastising their of-

fences. The programme of revelation is widely different. Conversion is God's roundabout way of getting into the rear of a man's vices to dislodge them and to compel their retreat. Instead of contenting Himself with an immediate onslaught on our sins and follies, the Divine Saviour follows a deeper policy, and works round by the understanding, conscience, and heart, although the process is intangible and protracted, and does not commend itself to the natural man. And the whole process of our sanctification is effected in the same way. We pray earnestly that we may be enabled to attain this grace or the other, but the graces sought are not in some supernatural way immediately planted in our heart. Is prayer therefore unheeded? Not so. It is usually answered through a long course of events whose significance at the time we do not comprehend, but which eventually disciplines us into the very perfections we coveted. Henry Drummond, writing of the rest which God gives His people, remarks: "It is a roundabout way, apparently, of producing rest; but nature generally works by circular processes; and it is not certain that there is any other way of becoming humble, or of finding rest. If a man could make himself humble to order it might simplify matters, but we do not find that this happens."

God's order in the purification of society is similarly devious. The frontal attack on public evil is the only mode that commends itself to the mind of many reformers; but the Captain of Israel directs His unseen and unsuspected armies into the rear of social sins and wrongs, cuts off their supplies, en-

velops them, saps and mines in the darkness, until the alien host mysteriously melts away. The New Testament makes no frontal attack on slavery, as abolitionism does; but first by the working of great doctrines of justice and love makes abolition inevitable. It makes no frontal attack on intemperance, as Mohammed did by the prohibition of wine; but by the slow, silent action of its grand ideals of purity and sacrifice guarantees and inaugurates a sober world. It makes no frontal attack on sensuality, after the manner of monasticism; but by revealing to men nobler delights and inspiring them with moral strength it hastens the time when all the people shall be righteous. The impatient resent this tardy process, yet the end shall justify it. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." The educationalist, the legalist, and the politician may unavailingly demonstrate for ever in the enemies' front, unless spiritual forces, which elude observation and work on eccentric lines, first render strongly intrenched evils untenable. The pathway by which God is introducing the race into its Canaan exhausts all mathematical figures. If nature abhors straight lines, still more does Providence. But He who governs the races and the ages has a sufficient reason for every detour and eccentricity. Do not resent the serpentine path, the confused movements, the unaccountable delays; eternal wisdom and compassion are ever discovering the line of least resistance for the race as well as for the individual.

Let us, then, imitate more closely the divine method of indirection in dealing with evil. In our personal moral culture we may act thus with advantage. To brood over our besetting sin becomes dangerous; it is wiser to attempt a flank movement, and defeat it by occupying our mind with other thoughts, interests, occupations, and pleasures. The smith seeking to render smooth a plate of iron that has been accidentally distorted does not smite directly the protuberances themselves, lest in doing so he should break or wound the plate he designs to flatten. Knowing the fibre of the metal, he strikes quite away from the obnoxious bulgings, so removing the inequalities without marring the sheet. In dealing with the faults of society there is a place for protest and prohibition, but to treat them effectually we must take the wide excursions of the intellectual and spiritual reformer. Most profitably might the ministry cultivate this generalship. Didactic and controversial presentments of the truth are not the most effective; we succeed best when the reader or congregation hardly knows where the moral comes in. Direct assaults on men's opinions and defects often provoke them into the attitude of self-justification and defiance, whilst the noble guile of insinuation and suggestion manœuvres them out of prejudices and positions we deprecate. Astronomers are said to see certain stars whilst they look askance.

> Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
> And things unknown proposed as things forgot.

In attempting the recovery of the fallen remember the charm and virtues of indirection. The instructed

physician of to-day, in dealing with morbid conditions of mind and body, hopes much less from direct methods of medicine and treatment than from the indirect action of education and environment. This holds good equally in the treatment of morbid elements of character. In the training of children the shortest way of dealing with their faults may prove the longest. Do not unceasingly and painfully emphasize the fault and labour it; attenuate and destroy the evil thing by getting at it from another side. Lead the child along the line of least resistance. When by stratagem we carry our point with neighbours or friends we say, "I got round them." By a worthy artfulness let us "get round" people, that we may save them from Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land.

XXXVII

WHAT WE MAY DO TOWARDS OUR SALVATION

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.—HOSEA X. 12.

THAT we can do anything towards our salvation has often been denied. Some contend that seekers after redemption have nothing to do with the means of grace, that they ought not to search the Scriptures, and that they must not even use private prayer; they ought to be *still* until the Spirit of God gifts them with living faith and blesses them with the consciousness of salvation. Others who are not thus extreme are nevertheless suspicious of anything done with a view to a new nature and a new life. Certainly this attitude of passivity is contrary to the law of our natural life. Everything we possess, or can hope to possess, of worldly blessing is the free gift of God, but as a rule it is imparted only to the diligent seeker.

> The forest trees—
> Do they fall round us into builded homes
> Without an axe or arm? The blowing winds
> Are but our servants when we hoist a sail.

We know the usual fate of the passive people in society, of those who wait for "something to turn up." Things do not turn up, they turn down, and every day finds the idle dreamer involved in deeper embarrassment and misery. The analogy is complete with the higher life. The supreme gifts—a pure heart, a peaceful conscience, a righteous character, a glorious immortality—do not come unsought; they are vouchsafed only to those who seek the Lord with their whole heart.

What, then, may we do with a view to our salvation? "Sow to yourselves in righteousness; break up your fallow ground." What is implied in this instruction?

An interior preparation for the blessing is necessary. We may not expect it without a suitable attitude of mind and heart. Indeed, any kind of discovery whatever is impossible without mental sympathy and expectation in the seeker. The fallen apple would never have become historic if Newton's genius had not been mathematical, and his mind occupied with natural problems; the swinging lamp in the cathedral at Pisa would have oscillated for ages without shedding other illumination than that of oil, if Galileo had not sympathetically pondered the mysteries of matter and motion; America would have been mistaken for a cloud on the horizon, if faith and desire had not sharpened the vision of Columbus; the primrose by the river's brim would have perished as nothing more than a primrose, if reflection and sensibility had not prepared Darwin to see in it the revelation of an unknown law.

A distinguished writer has shown that in all research and experiment the use of the imagination is essential; that without sympathetic predisposition and alertness the secrets of nature remain impenetrable. It is the same with the great saving truths of religion; they can be apprehended only by seriously seeking souls. In the temper of criticism, in the attitude of antagonism, in the mood of indifference, it is impossible to discern the truth to the saving of the soul. "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." "With their faces thitherward;" here is depicted the true attitude of the inquirer and seeker after God, and without it we miss the goal. As Dean Church puts it: "The way and direction we choose to look make a great difference as to what we see and what we do not see." Surely there is enough to justify our quest of these higher things, and we can hope to find them only as in the right spirit we follow on to know them. Our "desire must be to the remembrance of His name." By reading, meditation, and earnest prayer we make to ourselves a new heart; bring ourselves into such an expectant, responsive mood that we are able to see, feel, and grasp the things freely given us of God. In the early morning plants are wet with the dew, whilst stones are dry; thus the grace of God distils on prepared hearts, whilst the stony and unreceptive remain unvisited and unblessed.

A preparation of the life is also essential. Throughout God's holy Word it is insisted that in seeking for the great salvation we "break off" our

"sins." Cries Isaiah: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." Jeremiah makes the same demand: "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto Me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of My sight, then shalt thou not remove. For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." It is useless to sow among thorns, they choke every good impulse and resolve; in other words, to continue in sin quenches the Spirit and renders abortive all prayers and tears. Hosea points the same moral: "Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord." The teaching of the New Testament is invariably to this effect. One known sin deliberately retained means the forfeiture of every blessing of the covenant. Do any object?

> Just as I am, and waiting not
> To rid my soul of one dark blot,
> To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
> O Lamb of God, I come!

Yes, even so; but our contention remains in full force. The prodigal came to his father's house just as he was; nevertheless he forsook the far country, the harlots, and the swine. Christian could not cleanse his filthy rags nor free his burden; yet he turned his back upon the guilty companionships and pleasures of the City of Destruction. If we would enjoy the

great salvation Christ came to secure, we must remember the Baptist's exhortation to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

Finally, plant yourself in the appointed paths of blessing. In the "King's highway" wait the passing of the Royal Presence. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." It has been said: "It is not enough to be ready to go where duty calls. A man should stay around where he can hear the call." Stay around, listening with a keen ear where God is most likely to speak; watching with eager vision where He has promised to reveal Himself. Frequent the place where prayer is wont to be made; search the Scriptures; listen to pious counsels. With your feet on holy ground, with the right book in your hand, with the right people about you, with your eyes uplifted and expectant, wait for the light and joy that may be delayed, but which cannot be denied.

> The Lord shall to His temple come,
> Prepare your hearts to make Him room.

Think of the unprofitable years of the past! "The fallow ground." Our great nature unworked; the great possibilities of life unrealized. No fruits of light; no sweet-smelling flowers of grace and purity; no golden sheaves of noble service. But fallow ground will produce something, a something that is worthless and mischievous; and it is ever thus with the unregenerate, unconsecrated life. Roots of bitterness have poisoned our days; hemlock growths made us a curse

instead of a blessing; thorns and briers, fit only for burning, are the sad harvest of a neglected soul. And the brighter sides and things of wasted years are no more satisfactory. The bright yellow of the hated charlock and the dazzling scarlet of the poppies give no pleasure to the husbandman; they are only poisonous weeds, despite all their showiness: and the gaieties of a godless life are not pleasures of memory. "What fruit had ye then, in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death."

Think of the riches of the new life in Christ! "Reap in mercy." "Till He come and rain righteousness upon you." According to the measure or proportion of mercy shall God grant to the penitent soul the gifts of grace. This is the glorious standard of blessing. Thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold spring from the seeds sown in the fields; and in the moral sphere God refreshes and enriches us beyond all our thoughts. He blesses, not according to our merits, prayers, or expectations, but according to the freeness and largeness of His mercy. He shall make you wiser, stronger, holier, happier, more useful, beyond all that you can ask or think. Broken up, that fallow ground shall bear golden harvests, roses of Sharon, fruits of Paradise.

"Seek the Lord till He come." Continue the search quite up to the point and time when you shall find. A celebrated gold-mine in Nevada is known as the Eureka, and a mournful history is connected with it. The original owner, after working it without success, was obliged to abandon it. He retired to San Francisco, where he lived in indigence for some time, finally cutting his wife's throat and those of his two children,

and then blowing out his own brains. Those who re-opened the mine struck the gold only twelve feet beyond the spot where the poor fellow had ceased working. Do not stop short of the heavenly blessing and sink in despair. "It is time to seek the Lord" If the husbandman permit the auspicious hours to pass, the harvest is lost.

XXXVIII

THE DEVIL'S RIDDLE

Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?—Job i. 9.

SATAN assumes that the godliness of the patriarch rested on the secular advantage attending it. "Hast Thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." The accuser then proceeds to predict that if the secular advantage ceased the godliness would cease with it. "But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." The inference to be drawn from the Satanic impeachment is that godliness inspired by sordid selfishness is worthless; piety must rest on other and higher grounds than material advantage. So far it must be granted that the devil's theology is orthodox, as indeed his theology usually is; his failure is elsewhere. The true religious life is independent of all arithmetic.

Several subjects do not permit calculation of the worldly order. Certain vocations and relationships are so lofty that they are desecrated by the very thought of financial gain or social advancement; the fine gold

becomes dim at the suspicion of mercenary design. Art cannot be cultivated in the spirit of gain. The ancient masterpieces of sculpture, architecture, and painting arose out of the pure impulse of genius, the passionate love of perfection, and not out of greed. Splendid workmanship is native to solitude and lowliness, as some choice fruits and flowers are reared best on the poorer soils. In the atmosphere of fortune, luxury, and renown genius withers. Great music does not come by the way of the Stock Exchange. The singing robes of the premier poets are commonly threadbare. Science also is easily hurt by commercialism. The true student of nature works in simple love of the truth, knowing nothing of thoughts of aggrandizement. In the opinion of competent judges modern science has been seriously compromised by too close association with industrialism; vast are the material advantages ensured by science, but it must not be cultivated in the commercial spirit. Detachment from the world is essential to all high intellectual work; a glance at fiscal gain or social glory mars the power and efficacy of the most brilliant genius. In the realm of the social affections material considerations are still more intolerable. Love shrinks from sordid reckonings; and if for a moment it should be seduced into any thought of interest, its divine quality is lost. Partnership in business is legitimate enough, yet business under the guise of friendship is a painful confusion impossible to sensitive souls. "Commerce, traffic, speculation are honourable words when properly applied, but they are infamous when applied to marriage," as Marie Bashkirtseff justly declares. Love,

friendship, philanthropy are affairs of the heart, and any alloy of interested motives converts these terms into expressions of the worst forms of fraudulent pretence.

But coming to goodness, which is another word for godliness, we enter a realm where mercenary thoughts are simply profane. In the lower stages of personal religious experience, as in the earlier stages of national religious development, the bargaining temper of the patriarch Jacob may be condoned; but in the higher stages, which cannot be delayed without serious loss, the huckstering spirit has entirely passed away. "Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money. . . . But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money." In our day dollars and divinity are associated without causing any special shock, but to men full of the spirit of Christ the association was sacrilegious; the attempt to obtain spiritual power with money, or to get money out of spiritual virtue, was equally impious. The strong language of Peter shows that profit and piety are utterly irreconcilable in religious thought and motive, although they are often and naturally coincident in practical life.

It is the duty of Christian men to preserve their religious life not only from gross secularism, but also from every refinement of interested motives; we must remember that simony may exist in subtle forms, and find application through a wide range. Revelation everywhere represents goodness as of transcendent

character, and bases it confidently on transcendent motives; we might all be spirits inhabiting a spiritual world so far as the New Testament concerns itself with political instructions or material provisions. Christianity little concerns itself with material advantage, and it makes few promises in terms of bread and gold. Its great design is to captivate the human spirit by the sight of God's beauty and love, so that perfect obedience may spring out of pure admiration, reverence, and affection. It identifies man with the truth itself, so that right action does not result from the lower reason of utility, but from the higher cause of a will so purified from self as to sympathize by instinct with the eternal laws. And this ultimate ideal of unselfish life and obedience commends itself to our deepest consciousness; for the fatal objection to utilitarian morality is not logical, but is found in that incurable sentiment of the heart which is not satisfied unless the highest conduct is the expression of pure affection.

Are we capable of this pure affection and disinterested service? Human nature is capable of far more disinterestedness than it usually gets credit for. Selfish instincts are indeed strong, and sadly overlay the higher instincts, yet we are often reminded of the latent poetry of the human heart. Miss Anna Swanwick, the translator of the dramas of Æschylus, formed a class of shop girls and servants. Once when she was trying to interest them in Milton, some one suggested that instruction in arithmetic would be more useful, considering their work and future. She thought not, but resolved to leave it to themselves to decide.

So at their next meeting she put the question to them, "Which do you prefer—instruction in the poets or in book-keeping? and, not to hasten their decision, left them to discuss it among themselves, telling them that she would come back for their answer. When she returned she found that only two of the girls were in favour of what bore upon their ordinary work; all the rest wished what would take them away from it or lift them above it.

We get splendid glimpses of the higher susceptibilities and possibilities of human nature when and where we least expect them; a noble idealism triumphs over gross secularism, flashing out like a diamond in the dark. By the glorious energy of divine light and grace this faculty of disinterestedness is stimulated until the love of truth, right, and beauty fills the soul, and the whole man is mastered by the highest impulses and forces, unconscious of meaner interests and hopes. The raiser of the celebrated Shirley poppy tells how he noticed in a waste corner of his garden a patch of common wild field-poppies, one solitary flower having a very narrow edge of white; preserving its seed, and by careful and diligent culture year by year, the successive flowers got a larger infusion of white to tone down the red, whilst the black central portion was gradually changed, until the flower throughout became absolutely a pure white. Just as the skill of man, taking advantage of a slight tendency in the flower, transforms the black heart and fiery leaves of a poisonous weed into a sort of eucharistic lily; so divine grace seizes upon the gracious susceptibilities of degenerate nature, and converts the selfish soul into the

rarest beauty of purity and disinterestedness. We have seen too many delightful changes worked in humanity to doubt this crowning transformation. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and asks no aid from lucre.

Let us not enter on the religious life with the thought of worldly advantage. It is quite admissible to defend religion against the reproaches of secularism, but it is a fatal mistake to adopt religion on any ground of worldly welfare. In this age far too much is made of the big loaf and the social laurel to persuade men to follow Christ; and the consequence of holding forth such inducements can only be unhappy. Art does not confer upon her elect disciples popularity, or J. F. Millet would not have suffered neglect; science does not grant opulence to her brilliant sons, or Faraday would not have remained poor; literature does not guarantee social eminence, or Carlyle would not have lived and died in such modest estate; nor does religion tempt by vulgar bribes of worldly largess. They who followed the Master because they ate of the loaves and were filled soon forsook Him, and discipleship inspired by hopes of earthly gain is ever precarious. It is only when we dare to serve God for nought that we discover the infinite riches God's nought stands for.

Let us not become discontented with our spiritual faith if it ceases to be accompanied by worldly advantage. The vast reward of a godly life is in the soul itself, and no spoiling of our goods can abate this inward wealth and felicity. James Smetham's painting, poetry, and study of literature did not lead to conventional success; yet toward the end of life

he wrote: "In my own secret heart I look on myself as one who *has* got on, and got to his goal, as one who has got something a thousand times better than a fortune, more real, more inward, less in the power of others, less variable, more immortal, more eternal; as one whose feet are on a rock, his goings established, with a new song in his mouth, and joy on his head." Here is the exceeding great reward of devout souls, however carnal fortune may fail.

XXXIX

THE GRAND GOAL AND THE LOWLY PATH

To them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption, eternal life.—Rom. ii. 7.

The Grandeur of the Quest.—"Seek for glory and honour and incorruption." What thrilling words these are when taken with their great meanings! Some would eliminate them from the vocabulary, and shut us up to more modest language. But take these words, properly understood, out of the vocabulary, and what will be the effect on *character?* The noblest character, the strongest and most beautiful life, are impossible without the large ideas and hopes expressed in these terms. One of the finest orchids in the world is found in England, but owing to the inclement climate it grows in a dwarfed form destitute of beauty, and is of no value; and the various virtues which bloom so radiantly under the quickening influences of the great ideals and promises of the New Testament, dwindle and sicken into mere dull properties once those vital influences fail. Supreme character is born and sustained in magnificent spiritual conceptions.

Take these great words out of the vocabulary, and

what will be the effect on *experience?* Can the spirit within us live without them? "No," says the secularist; "the spirit of man will not be content without these words; but glory, honour, and incorruption are found within the worldly life." Are they? "Glory" —have we that? Glory means solidity, reality, durability, and certainly we know nothing of these in the temporal sphere. If the spirituality of our nature is denied, man himself is palpably only a bubble, and all the worlds inflated films floating in space and doomed to vanish. There is no substance, no persistence where there is no spirit. "Honour"—have we that? When the soul is denied, we become like the beasts which perish, and the honours of life's short day are golden shoes, purple saddles, jingling bells. "Immortality"— have we that? Yes; fame. Fame! a death's-head crowned with a fading wreath.

The fact is, we have not these *things,* only these *words,* if we are without faith in God, the spirituality of our own nature and the eternal world. There is no lofty, luminous character, no rich, satisfying experience, except the living God and life in Him are recognized. *"Thou* shalt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Let us seek and expect the realization of these great words in their largest significance. "To them who seek for glory and honour and incorruption, *eternal life."* Heaven goes beyond our utmost ideas, aspirations, and hopes, filling our biggest poetic words with over-running, infinite meaning. We have seen that on the lips of men these words shrink into very nothingness; but God gives them actu-

ality, widens them into boundlessness, and fills them to overflowing with glorious suggestion and promise. Aim at the highest. When a great ideal slips out of a man's soul, he begins to rot; only as we cherish high and holy thoughts and beliefs do we find rest to our soul, and reach the stature of the perfect man.

The Simplicity of the Pathway.—"To them that by patience in well-doing seek." There is something quite startling between the grandeur of the aim and the homeliness of the condition. "Well-doing." "Glory, honour, and incorruption" are usually sought in very different paths, but at last the plain path is the royal one. Not brilliant strokes in trade, war, or scholarship, but *well-doing* in ordinary life. Doing humbly, purely, justly, hopefully the work God has assigned, whatever that work maybe. Fulfilling our task with a willing mind, a loving heart, and both hands. Nothing heroic; only faithfulness, simple diligence, and quiet perseverance in being good, getting good, doing good. In this world the grand prizes chiefly go to the brilliant few; the rewards for patient continuance in well-doing are painfully rare and modest. It was so at school where we began. The brilliant fellows got everything; the dull plodders little if anything. It is thus in the big world. Dull merit, patient conscientiousness, are lightly passed over. The world affects men who can conduct a dashing campaign, deliver a brilliant speech, pull a fortune out of the fire, or engineer dramatic movements; it worships genius, brilliance, audacity. The laurels of society are reserved for extraordinary talents and histrionic achievements. What a blessing to know that God rec-

ognizes patient merit, and that He reserves the major prizes for dutiful souls faithful unto death!

Heaven recognizes *the greatness of simple character.* The greatest moral qualities, powers, and virtues exist in the humblest men and women. A musician listening to the talk of common people can distinguish in the cadences of their voices chords of the world's greatest music, notes of its sweetest songs and mightiest oratorios; and the sublimest faith and heroism of prophets, apostles, and martyrs are revealed in the works and ways of the dim multitude. It is easy to overlook great character in humble guise, yet it is clearly seen by Him who appreciates it the most. An art critic affirms that "scale is not a very important element in distinct impression"; but we are afraid that fine moral character and action are repeatedly unmarked by us when they lack social magnitude and conspicuousness. When magnanimity, patience, integrity, purity, and all the other graces are only on the inch scale of lowly life, they are liable to be ignored or disesteemed; we can appreciate majestic lines and fair colours only in heroic figures and expansive cartoons. But He who is a Spirit, and who judges according to truth, knows little of size and show; in His reckoning, the vastness of the circle is nothing, the exactly round being the question; the length of the line is not measured, only its straightness noted; the magnitude of the object is of trifling import, its truthfulness is the essential thing, even if that truthfulness is revealed only by the microscope. God knows the spiritual essence of all that is done, and unerringly recognizes the great soul in the small act. Many

amongst us are greater than they know; their actions greater than they think. We have all heard of the man who spoke prose for forty years without knowing it; but a fact of far greater interest is that scores of men speak poetry without knowing it—nay, act splendid poetry without knowing it; and God shall surprise them with glory, honour, and incorruption beyond their most glowing dream.

God recognizes *the greatness of simple duty.* In a lowly post, entrusted with commonplace offices, called daily to discharge the most menial service, we may express the noblest conscientiousness, the most exquisite feeling, sublimest principle and behaviour. Lafcadio Hearn, in his last book on Japan, writes thus about the tea ceremonies which are such a feature in the female education of this artistic people: "The elaborate character of these ceremonies could be explained only by the help of many pictures; and it requires years of training and practice to graduate in the art of them. Yet the whole of this art, as to detail, signifies no more than the making and serving of a cup of tea. However, it is a real art—a most exquisite art. The actual making of the infusion is a matter of no consequence in itself: the supremely important matter is that the act be performed in the most perfect, most polite, most graceful, most charming manner possible. Everything done—from the kindling of the charcoal fire to the presentation of the tea—must be done according to rules of supreme etiquette; rules requiring natural grace as well as great patience to fully master. Therefore a training in the tea ceremonies is still held to be a training in politeness, in

self-control, in delicacy—a discipline in deportment." The matter of making and serving a cup of tea has been invested with all this importance; it has been made the frail instrument of artistic discipline, and has become the sign of culture. Not in studies and exercises of a splendid and expensive order, open to the elect few, have these wonderful people found the training for refined action and delicate behaviour, but in the simple, cheap, daily act of domestic life. Did not our Master teach the same lesson on a higher plane with the cup of cold water, where the grace of the gift is the chief thing, and the gift itself the symbol of the highest character? The training for glory, honour, and incorruption lies in the right use of vocations and vessels accounted vulgar by the thoughtless; and they who are faithful in that which is least shall inherit all things.

God recognizes *the greatness of simple suffering.* A writer has recently protested that the world just now wants heroes. Society comprehends more heroes than it knows. Gordon flashed a splendid figure on the imagination of the world, but many such heroes are hidden in obscure life. The hidden ones are sometimes much the more glorious. Carlyle awoke Europe with his monstrous melody if a neighbour's cock happened to crow; yet simple people all around us bear uncomplainingly the most bitter suffering, bravely resist the most terrible temptations, and with manly silence sustain the heaviest burdens. Obscure life conceals illustrious heroism, known only to God, but it *is* known to Him, and shall not lose its recompense of reward.

Let us not despise lowly station and the hum-drum

life. If we cannot belong to the flowers of the garden, the aristocracy of flowers, let us be content to be flowers of the grass—very beautiful in the eyes of Him who makes the grass to grow upon the mountains, and who clothes with grace the lily of the field. Not in brilliance, but in simple work honestly wrought are we perfected. Let us believe in high truths, and at the same time in the divinity of fag.

> Be mild, and cleave to gentle things,
> Thy glory and thy happiness be there.

XL

PASSIVE FAITH

What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him?—JAS. ii. 14.

A MAN'S consciousness of his relation to God may be so vague that it exercises no influence whatever on his character and conduct, or let us say, no appreciable influence. It is possible to hold the Christian creed so faintly that it exerts no more practical influence over us than our knowledge of mythology. Lord Bacon writes of "bed-ridden truths." He means truths dimly seen and ineffectually realized: truths which, for some reason or other, do not assert themselves and produce the effects to which they are logically competent. Through long ages master thinkers get glimpses of the idea, in some measure they expound and enforce it, but it remains nebulous and ineffective, a mere speculation.

It was thus with the doctrine of liberty. Through many generations great thinkers appreciated the obligation and grandeur of freedom in thought and government, and ever and anon vindicated most eloquently "the liberty of prophesying"; yet it was only in modern times that their contention proved availing, and liberty of thought and speech was granted. The truths

were within ken, and received logical attestation, but, as Bacon pictures them, they were "bed-ridden"; they were blear-eyed, had no use of their hands, only found their voice as a sleeper does in nightmare, they were weak in their ankle joints, and could not descend the stair and make themselves felt in the street, the market-place, parliament, the academy, and the temple. It is with the race as with the individual. Nominal Christians verbally subscribe to all the articles of the creed, but the glorious truths they confess with their lip are invalided and sterile. Their mind is a dormitory of slumbering admissions, a sick ward of impotent beliefs, anæmic sentiments, paralytic and crippled purposes. This phantom faith does not energize, constrain, inspire, transform, or make anything it touches to live.

We call this "faith," but really it has no claim to be thus distinguished—rather ought it to be known as fancy opinion, speculation, or sentiment. How does the New Testament describe faith? "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." This is what revelation means by faith—conviction, enthusiasm, sacrifice, heroism—the victory that overcometh self, sin, and the world. How far away to-day is the faith of thousands from this vital force? Our creed is in our memory, on our lip, it revolves in our imagination, we give a faint, general, unimpassioned assent to the supreme verities; but our so-called faith does not force its way into thought, experience,

and conduct; it does not command our understanding, kindle our affections, energize our will, hallow our life. A heartfelt confidence in God and in His Son Jesus Christ is quickening throughout the whole personality and life as sunshine upon germs sown in honest ground; the traditional faith of the nominal believer is moonshine on snow. The faith that worketh by love, purifying and kindling the heart, has the magical virtue of a summer's day which makes everything to live; the phantom faith of the conventional orthodox is the frigid lustre of the northern lights.

"Can that faith save him?" We are assured that an educated Hindu will pass an examination in hygiene and then look on complacently while every imaginable sanitary law is violated within the walls of his own compound. He does not so realize his science as to appreciate its practical import, he is content with the abstruse knowledge, never proceeding to apply it. Does that faith save him? Is the educated Hindu in his filthy compound delivered by his abstract knowledge from enteric, plague, cholera? We know that his theoretic science gives him no immunity whatever; he falls a victim to the prevailing epidemic just as readily as do those who never heard of any science of health. Likewise the nominal saint masters the creeds, sometimes so thoroughly that he could pass a theological examination, and then in actual experience and conduct violates every great spiritual and moral law. Will *his* faith save him? Nay, *does* it save him? Does it save him from guilty fear, filling his heart with the peace of God's adopted children? Does it save from the power of passion and selfishness,

strengthening him to live in purity and love? Does it save in the day of temptation, enabling the tempted one to put away the evil thing? Does it save in the day of trouble, bringing strong consolation into the stricken heart? The theoretic knowledge of the Hindu, who practically disregards sanitary law, cannot save him from disease and death, so the notional ghostly faith of the nominal Christian is not able to save him from overmastering passion, sloth, sadness, and sin. And what fails to save here and now is not likely to save us elsewhere and hereafter. That faith, and that faith alone, which is genuine enough and strong enough to bring peace and purity now, can secure us eternal salvation. What stops with fancy and dreams is of little count in any department of life, least of all in questions of character and destiny.

XLI

FAITH AND MORALS

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils, and by Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.—MATT. vii. 22, 23.

RELIGIOUS faith may be held so that it affects character injuriously, and works out in ways and acts of unrighteousness. In a letter written by the late Mr. Gladstone to the Duchess of Sutherland occurs this passage: "There is one proposition which the experience of life burns into my soul; it is this, that man should beware of letting his religion spoil his morality. In a thousand ways, some great, some small, but all subtle, we are daily tempted to that great sin." How well founded is this admonition to beware of letting our religion spoil our morality! The Pharisees of our Lord's day show how real this danger is. The result of their energetic religious faith was deplorable; it produced the worst type of character we know. "Working death by that which is good" was the melancholy distinction of the Pharisee.

History furnishes abundant proof of the ruinous effects of misdirected religious faith. We see how the vices come to their last sad perfection in religious

circles and atmospheres. The Inquisition made of cruelty a fine art. The Jesuits reduced duplicity to a science. Ecclesiastical tyranny has ever been the worst form of tyranny. Pride reached its apotheosis in the successors of the apostles. The Puritans contrived to give to virtue a fierceness and hardness which made it repulsive. And the golden calf was never worshipped more passionately than by those who sought to make the best of both worlds. Nowhere has pride been more lofty, gluttony more greedy, craft more subtle, ingratitude more base, covetousness more grasping, temper more fierce, cruelty more unsparing, than when and where prompted and consecrated by religious faith and zeal. Immorality cannot be brought to its last inglorious maturity without some sort of religious stimulation. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." And they could not be the ghastly shapes they are if they did not believe. This effect is inevitable if faith through ignorance, prejudice, or insincerity operates on wrong lines. Religious belief is "the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death"; and it is an indirect testimony to the divinity of our religion that the worst of character is bread in the Christian Church.

> Grace abused brings forth the foulest deeds,
> As richest soil the most luxuriant weeds.

Great indeed are the obligations and perils of religious belief; we must be much the better or terribly the worse for it. The science of electricity puts us in the front of civilization, but he who blunders with it is

a corpse; and the action of religious enthusiasm is similarly decisive. If a spiritual faith does not correct our native faults, it accentuates and exaggerates them. The intolerant become more fiercely dogmatic, the irritable more bitterly irascible, the mean unspeakably contemptible, and the sins of the flesh affecting religious sanctions are peculiarly odious. By misconception and misdirection, by mistaken ends and methods, we turn the grace of God to lasciviousness.

Religious faith must be so held that it glorifies character; the faith which spoils morality cannot save. "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." The one great ideal of the Old and New Testament is the transfiguration of character, the holiness of life. Every visitor to Palestine is impressed with the prominence of Mount Hermon. That superb, isolated cone, covered with snow nearly all the year, is practically visible from every district and corner of the Holy Land. Whether you journey in Judea, Samaria, or Galilee, whatever may be the locality or point of view, one never gets away from that dazzling dome. As Hermon dominates Palestine, so does the idea of holiness dominate revelation. Whether the sacred writer is treating of cosmogony, history, philosophy, prophecy, or doctrine, righteousness is the motive and aim of his argument. We are no more permitted to lose sight of purity than the geography of the sacred land allows its people to lose sight of Hermon's stainless crest. Religion does not call upon us for "many mighty works," or, indeed, for any "mighty" work whatever; it calls for good works, for whatsoever is true, honest,

pure, and lovely. If we would not that our religious faith should spoil our morality, let us keep this truth continually in mind.

A true faith will not distort character, but, on the contrary, bring it to splendid perfection. If religion is not to mar our morality, we must have the right kind of religion, and the right kind is the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we see exemplified the holiness for which revelation everywhere pleads; and in Him we find the grace making that holiness possible. We must fix our eye, not on traditionalism or ecclesiasticism, but on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Whenever we examine the religion that disfigures character and perverts conduct, we discover that it is a religion vitiated by foreign elements, a faith lacking simplicity and spirituality. It is occupied with antiquity, its controversies and interpretations. It is largely biased by ecclesiastical canons, rubrics, and theories. No longer the direct, clear vision of the Lord, it has become obscure and oblique. We ever need to fix our eye on the living Christ and the great facts and verities of His gospel. It is so easy to let human teachings and institutions blind us to the divine holiness, which is the first and last question for us all. Clinging to "the simplicity that is in Christ," we cannot get far wrong on matters of moral duty. If we cherish His Spirit, we shall be saved from the sophistry which turns grace into lasciviousness; and if we daily walk with Him, all noble virtues and sweet graces will spontaneously spring in our heart and life.

XLII

REALITY AND RANGE IN CHRISTIAN FAITH

And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou rooted up, and be thou planted in the sea; and it would have obeyed you. —LUKE xvii. 5, 6.

AS a rule we are more anxious about the range of our faith than about its reality. We are most concerned that faith should be commensurate with the great creeds; and if we find ourselves unable to receive this article or that, we regard ourselves as excluded from the household of faith. Does not our Lord in the text teach that the matter of first import is not the comprehensiveness or intensity of faith, but its reality? Faith, however limited or feeble, if only genuine and vital, is full of efficacy. A grain of genuine trust in the righteous God, in the supernatural universe, in the divine government, in the virtue of the Cross, in the power of grace, in the life everlasting, contains within itself all virtue and promise. A hundred guineas were recently refused for a microscopic speck of the pollen of a rare orchid, so precious is the dust of beauty. The fact is, that microscopic speck of pollen would have enabled its pur-

chaser to produce no one knows what abundance of hybrid and original orchids; to have adorned his own and a thousand other conservatories with new and delightful flowers. So our Lord teaches that out of a microscopic speck of genuine faith in God, in His most holy Word, in His eternal promise in Christ Jesus, will spring purity and peace, strength and victory, high character and heroic service—in this world all the graces of the Spirit, and in the next all the flowers and fruits of paradise. A vague, passive faith that is neither belief nor disbelief is worth little; a sterling faith, however weak and hesitating, holds the potency and promise of universal grace and glory.

A religious faith that is as a grain of mustard seed greatly distinguishes its possessor, and invests him with a glorious moral mastery. How wonderful it is when a man is born with a grain of poetry in his brain! That fact differentiates him from the vast majority of men, and gives to his words and work charm and power. In his imagination common things are mysteriously enhanced, the splendour of nature unseen by other eyes dazzles his, and human life, so prosaic to the mass, is romantic to one in whose soul shines the poetic gleam. We may inherit only a grain of poetry, yet that mystic atom makes an almost infinite difference; the world that otherwise were a dust-heap is a jewel-heap, and life that otherwise were dark and dull is sprinkled with azure and gold. And this mere dust of poetry in the brain creates the picture, the music, the song, the oration about which men talk and which they do not willingly let die. What a wonderful

gift is a spark of genius! It is indefinable, elusive, incalculable, yet the difference that it establishes between men is immense; they who possess it are seers looking straight into the secret of things, and by their knowledge of the laws and forces of nature they make us masters of the situation. A spark of genius constitutes a unique personality, one gifted with vision and sovereign skill, a miracle-worker in the natural sphere.

So our Lord declares it to be with the believer whose faith is "as a grain of mustard seed." It is far from being a completed faculty or exercise, but the least in the kingdom of God have in their actual, sympathetic, transforming confidence in a higher world a most precious source of vision and energy. What the grain of poetry or the spark of genius is in the mental world, the gleam of spiritual faith is in all that pertains to the higher life of man. One vivid vision of God—His goodness, holiness, nearness; one real sight of the Saviour's all-sufficing merit and love; one heartfelt experience of the virtue of heavenly grace; one flash of the eternity which awaits us and which is so surely ours,—these, or any of these, inspire a power which can remove mountains, reveal all life in a new light, and bring into the soul consolations and hopes far beyond anything known to the natural man. The main thing is not to believe in many propositions faintly and doubtfully, but to get a fast grip upon the truths by which men live. All the great doctrines of salvation are related, and hang together by secret bonds; and if we once get hold of any of these, we may be sure that the Spirit of truth will in due season lead us into

the whole truth. Having seen "His star," all fainter stars and nebulæ on the far horizon may be trusted in due time to resolve themselves into bright constellations. We have only to be afraid when we hold no one saving truth with any clearness or sincerity.

"*One* thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." The modesty of the testimony of the man born blind may be imitated by us with great advantage. The scientist is often content to study a single branch of knowledge, to apprehend and illustrate one great principle of nature. Ordinary men regard such extremely limited specialism as quite unworthy and of little value, but the thinker knows better. He knows that to really master a fragment is to get hold of universal truth. As Sir James Paget writes: "If the field of any specialty in science be narrow, it can be dug deeply. In science, as in mining, a very narrow shaft, if only it be carried deep enough, may reach the richest stores of wealth, and find use for all the appliances of scientific art." So our view of spiritual truth may be confined; yet if it only be genuine and go deep enough, it will in due time bring us into possession of treasures of knowledge beyond all our thought and hope. Into many historical, metaphysical, and ecclesiastical questions we find ourselves unable to enter, yet we need not worry about this; grasping fundamental gospel truths with a sincere and sympathetic heart, God will in due order reveal related truths as we are able to receive and bear them. Such a genuine belief will certainly grow in clearness, fullness, and intensity. Let us, then, seek that hold upon God as revealed in Christ, in which meet the concur-

rence of the mind, the conscience, the affections, and the will; and such a faith, although now like a grain of mustard seed, shall wax into noonday clearness and all-conquering power.

XLIII

THE CONDITION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The just shall live by his faith.—Hab. ii. 4.

GREAT ethical thinkers in all ages have understood the profound significance of this declaration, that the sense of the supernatural is the foundation and dynamic of righteous life. Grasping the facts of the unseen we are able to maintain our integrity in days of darkness and perplexity, of temptation and suffering, of threatening and peril. By faith we become just. This is the great truth which St. Paul grasped as against the traditionalism of the Jew, which Martin Luther urged as against papal ceremonialism. "I am not ashamed of the gospel . . . for therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith: as it is written. But the righteous shall live by faith" (Rom. i, 16, 17). The moral law convicts and condemns, but God in Christ has discovered for us the grounds of pardon and grace, the secret of renewal and righteousness. Taking God at His word, trusting in His declared mercy, resting on the infinite merit of that sacrifice in which God Himself was well pleased, the penitent consciously passes from death unto life. His iniquity is forgiven, his sin covered, he is treated as a discharged and righteous man, and when God treats a man as righteous He

makes him so. This is the justification by faith of which St. Paul treats so copiously; this is the doctrine which gave peace to Luther and vitality to his teaching. We are not accounted righteous, nor made so, by any ecclesiastical routine whatever; nor does a mechanical obedience to the law put us into a right relation to God or effect in us any change; we attain forgiveness, justification, and sanctification only as we grasp the promises of God in our redeeming Lord. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Being thus justified by faith we have peace with God. And by faith the just live. They so confide in the righteous God and in His declared promises, they remain so entirely loyal to the heavenly vision and hope which are beyond the ken of the natural man, that they are secretly strengthened in the darkest hours to hold fast their integrity. Faith in God means confidence in Him, fellowship with Him, devotion to Him; and such whole-hearted trust is the inspiration and guarantee of highest character, even when the stress and strain of life are most severe.

But are not many "just," without faith? Is not high character continually met with that has dispensed with supernatural stimulation? Christ says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Must we not therefore allow that consistently moral men are in the right, and that the promptings and succours of a religious faith are not indispensable? Our Lord's words are not to be interpreted in the facile shallow way that so many people think. As Professor Seeley wrote in *Ecce Homo*: "It is true that the good man does good deeds, but it is not necessarily true that

he who does good deeds is a good man. The difficulty of determining whether a man is or is not good has now become a commonplace of moralists and satirists." How far the good behaviour of men is the result of their personal faith and quality is a subject for investigation, and a very difficult subject. A while ago, in a London suburb, a professional gentleman gave a garden-party, and to surprise his friends he decorated the branches of his trees with flowers and fruits they had not known before. Golden citrons spangled the graceful birch; willows displayed crimson blossoms; oaks, instead of acorns, dropped down peaches, apples, and plums; hollies displayed purple clusters; and all the branches of the garden bore fruits pleasant to the eye and sweet to the taste, yet entirely at variance with the character of the trees on which they grew. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Not this time. They were not their fruits at all; the things of beauty and sweetness were artificially fastened to alien stems, and were no proofs of the nature or goodness of the tree on which they were imposed.

It is much the same with thousands of moral men and women of our day. The pleasant fruits supposed to express their fine quality are not their fruits at all. These virtues must be traced to other roots and stems, the good behaviour in question being largely the reflection of the general civilization which has been created by ages of faith. Inheritance and environment account for many proprieties which have little if any root in the living soul of those who boast them. If these amiable and blameless ones were planted in the wilderness, beyond the ring-fence of a civilization sat-

urated by a spiritual faith, it would be seen how little these gracious fruits belong to them, and how little they signify the real character of the happily situated unbeliever. All true righteousness of life springs out of godliness. As George Macdonald sings:

> Lo, Lord, Thou know'st, I would not anything
> That in the heart of God holds not its root;
> Nor falsely deem there is any life at all
> That doth in Him, nor sleep nor shine nor sing;
> I know the plants that bear the noisome fruit
> Of burning and of ashes and of gall—
> From God's heart torn, rootless to man's they cling.

That the just live by faith is evidenced by the strength and beauty of the moral life of the saint. True, the character of many professing Christians is poor, and in some instances far worse than poor, but that is what might reasonably be expected from a vague or misconceived faith. Scientists say that the darkest places in the universe are the spots in the sun, and no wonder that the dark places of the Church are sometimes very dark. The worst persons I have known were living in Christian fellowship, and that they were the worst is what we should expect. A merely secular, sceptical sphere could not produce a Judas, close contact with the infinite love and beauty of the Lord was necessary to develop such a moral monster. But if the worst of men are in the Church, the best are there also. Nothing seems more wonderful or delightful to me than the vast numbers of noble men and women whom I have known; they stretch along the years as bright and beautiful as the Milky Way. This world has seen nothing more pure and lovely than the saints

and their Master. Every virtue comes to its last perfection under the sweet and vital influences of Christian faith, hope, and love. "The just shall live by faith"; let us boldly declare it. Nothing in character is real, nothing perfect, nothing abiding, except it is rooted in eternity, its branches bathed in heaven, its life kindled and sustained by the sunshine of God.

XLIV

MASKED PERILS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND FELLOWSHIP

Hidden rocks in your love-feasts.—JUDE 12.

THE ungodly men who had crept unawares into the Christian community are likened by the apostle to sunken rocks which amid smooth seas and under fair skies prove fatal to the mariner. But these hidden rocks present themselves in moods, theories, and sentiments, as well as in false brethren; and against these subtlest perils we must diligently watch. Many of the rocks which threaten us stand out conspicuously enough, we are ever being reminded of them, they are surmounted by warning lights, to run upon them means presumptuous sin; other perils, however, are hidden and almost unsuspected. We seek now to indicate several of these submerged reefs.

The quest of spiritual power whilst forgetting the uses of such power is one of these hidden rocks. Miss J. M. Fry made the following statement at a recent religious gathering: "Many persons are actuated by mere vanity in desiring the attainment of spiritual power." That is, we presume, such power is sought not for the high ends of personal sanctification or effective ministry, but rather for its self-complacent

possession. We understand how wealth may be desired for mere vanity: not with an appreciation of its uses, but out of the passion of possession and the desire of display. Intellectual power may be coveted from the same motive. Men desire scholarship and skill for the sake of the pride and pleasure of them, for ends of personal self-sufficiency and distinction. And the attainment of spiritual power may be prompted in much the same spirit. Here pride refines itself into invisibility, and we find it difficult to believe in its presence. Spiritual power should be sought so that the ignoble elements of our nature may be effectually purged, that the sanctification of our faculties may be complete, and that all our work for God and man may be efficient. To lose sight of these practical uses is to fall into a subtle snare of refined selfishness and vanity.

The cultivation of character in the artistic spirit is a snare of the spiritual life. One of our writers justly observes: "There are two kinds of artists, just as there are moral and spiritual souls. There are the trimmers, the superficialists, the amateurs, not loving beauty for itself, but for its advantages, socially and selfishly." Wuttke in discussing the morals of the Greeks shows that in their reckoning the beautiful was the good; and that, in their opinion, man is moral in enjoying and creating the beautiful. They regarded the moral idea chiefly as an object of artistic enjoyment, and morality as a matter of mere spectacle. Does not this danger beset us?—to cultivate holiness in the æsthetic spirit and as so much personal adornment? He who has understood the teaching of Christ never forgets

that the good is the beautiful, and that the two must be sought in this order. He remembers that loveliness of character is first a question of essence and not of form. This sculptor brings the statue to perfection by fine measurements and delicate touches on the surface, but a noble human body is such by virtue of indwelling life, and health, and purity. The Greek sought moral excellence as in the studio of the sculptor; whilst in the school of Christ, which is the school of life, beauty of character is forgotten and found in the purity of the soul. To cultivate the virtues in an artistic temper, and as so much personal ornament, is to fall into serious error; in the power of a holy spirit we much achieve exterior grace. Harmony, beauty, and serenity of life spring from essential truth, purity, and love. Least of all must moral gracefulness be studied as a matter of mere spectacle. How we stand in the eye of God ought to be the dominant thought; and if we live in His sight clothed in wrought gold, we shall hardly be unlovely in the sight of those about us. To cultivate moral beauty in the spirit of art and fashion is to make shipwreck on the coral reef of a silver sea.

Sensuous enjoyment may insinuate itself into spiritual culture so as to become a peril. It might be thought that there is little to fear from sensuality in a fervent spiritual life; it would seem so essentially coarse and vulgar as not to be susceptible of concealment or decoration. But it is not so. With the Greeks the worship of Aphrodite lent to sensuality itself a religious sanction; and the epistle before us makes manifest how soon the disciples of a far higher religion of love and beauty were in danger from the

sensual side. Very plainly does Jude speak of gross passions, temptations, and sins. "Strange flesh"; "in their dreamings defile the flesh"; "fornication"; and suggestions of unnatural sin, come in this epistle into strange association with godliness, spiritual enthusiasm, and that fellowship of love in which the primitive Church reached sublimity. A recent writer in discussing Sainte-Beuve and Chateaubriand, both of whom combined an ostentatious profession of religion with sexual licence, observes: "We know, however, that erotic mania and religious mania are in some strange fashion allied alike in Protestant and Catholic communities." The outcome of the high-pitched ideal of monasticism was often licentiousness; and the consecrated communities established by saints like Tersteegen were discredited by unseemly developments. It is true that "we cannot have mountains without precipices," and it is humbling and alarming to note that the love and purity of an exalted spiritual life may so easily pass into unhealthiness and sin. The "love-feast" became an orgie, and the heavenly love of the individual saint may imperceptibly degenerate into dangerous sentimentalism and profane passion.

To cultivate fervent devoutness apart from practical life is another peril of the spiritual. Intense emotion, ecstatic song, fervent witness-bearing, impassioned contemplation, fellowship, and devotion soon become dangerous when severed from the facts and duties of daily life. Contact with the realities of the worldly life is necessary to the health and sanity of the soul, to the strength and soundness of our piety. We must keep in touch with human relations and responsibilities,

we must at every step test our faith and feeling by their value in everyday life, even when caught up into paradise we must not lose sight of commonplace duty and things. The kindling afflatus, the lyrical utterance, the solemn awe that dare not move, the lips touched with fire, are precious and delightful in their place and season; but the mystical and ecstatic, the vision and the rapture, must immediately and consistently blend with practical life if they are to leave us strong and safe.

Talking too much about our spiritual life may prove to its detriment. Testimony-bearing in the love-feast is a duty and joy, but it is easy to injure our deepest life by discussing it too freely and too frequently. A French critic writes: "Beware of an artist who talks too well of his art. He wastes his art in talk." And it is as certainly true in regard to religion. Men think that they are in saintship because they discuss it so admirably, and they waste in talk the reality and energy of grace; were they to think more and talk less they would be safer. Reticence and reality are close kin. There is much that is sacred and secret about the experiences of the soul, and it is dangerous to violate its delicacy. So we need vigilance on every side.

> Keep me waiting watchful for Thy will—
> Even while I do it, waiting watchful still.

XLV

THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF GRACE

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.—Isa. ii. 4.

THE first great transformation effected by the grace of God is the transformation of the sinner into a saint. It is not the design of the gospel to destroy any of the faculties or affections, any of the energies of human nature, but to reform, renew and strengthen, to exalt them and give them a new direction. It aims to divert the powers of the soul from false and destructive ends, and to fix them on objects and exercises altogether worthy and beautiful. In conversion new faculties are not created within us; but, transformed in the spirit of our mind, the misdirected and dishallowed faculties are restored to high and holy uses. As Archer Butler puts it, "Trust, but trust in the living God. Preserve unbroken every element of your affections; they are all alike the property of heaven. Be ambitious, but ambitious of the eternal heritage. Let avarice be yours, but avarice of celestial treasures. Covet esteem, but esteem in the mind of God and the circles of the blessed. Labour after knowledge, but let it be 'the

light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Yearn after sympathy, but seek it where alone it is unfailing."

All these affections are native to us, they are primitive and essential, only they have been corrupted and misapplied; now it is the work of the Holy Spirit to cleanse and raise them, to find the true objects and materials of these divine impulses and desires. Noises are composed of pleasant sounds, only the sounds are irregularly mingled; indeed, the components of the most disagreeable noises are pure and true and pleasant as music, only the various notes are mingled in a painful confusion. So the faculties and energies of unregenerate nature are intrinsically sound and noble, although through becoming lawless they create cruel discords; and it is the special office and work of the Spirit of God to elicit order out of this anarchy, to mould into blessed harmony the hostile elements of nature. The natural man is a magazine of organs, gifts, sympathies, and desires, consecrate to violence, egotism, and sensuality: his powers are weapons which wound, mar, and destroy himself and his neighbours; but by the divine grace the perverted members and affections are transformed and pressed into the benign service of purity, unselfishness, peace, and fruitfulness. Grace does not destroy or mutilate individuality, it honours and hallows the whole host of our energies. And the stronger, the more intense, and the more mischievous the personality, the more rich and gracious does it become duly converted and controlled by the spirit of holiness. For, as shown experimentally in another sphere by Professor Balfour Stewart, the

blacker the body the brighter will be its light when incandescent. Saul changed into Paul is a fine instance of such moral transformation.

One of the Greek philosophers wrote: "And this is the greatest stroke of art, to turn an evil into a good." Such is the grand mission of the faith of Jesus Christ. It is the work of the devil to debase good things to vile uses; it is the task of the Spirit of grace to make of evil things vessels unto honour, fit for the Master's use. The other day we heard of a shell found on the battlefields of South Africa being converted into the bell of a church, as the brazen serpent was lifted up to save those who were dying of the bite of venomous serpents; and in many ways things, institutions, and methods which for ages have tormented and destroyed society are being transformed into instruments of blessing. Gold often works harmfully; history shows it a root of all evil. But it shall not be so for ever. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ shall purify gold as no refiner on earth ever purified it. "To Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba," and He shall cleanse it from the canker of ages, and make it an instrument of manifold and untold blessing. Gold is said by the alchemists to have its origin in the sun; they call it "the under sun," endowed by God with an incredible potency to free men from diseases and impurities. They dreamt better than they knew. The spirit of Christ shall change a root of all evil into a root of paradise bearing only fruits sweet and good. Art has been such a minister of vanity, such a source of corruption, that Carlyle wished "the devil would fly away with it"; but a spirit of truth and purity is

penetrating the universal mind, the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty are being increasingly recognized, and as this process continues the fine arts will become chosen ministers of God, whose action is only good. Pleasure has long beguiled and depraved; yet it, too, shall be transformed, as poison berries have been changed into delectable fruits, and rank weeds into perfumed flowers. Babylonish garments shall adorn the festivals of Zion; cups long profaned by excess shall shine in the sacraments of saints, as the sacred vessels were returned from the Captivity to the uses of the altar; and the roses of Bacchus and Venus, purified from every taint of voluptuousness, shall smell sweet again as in the golden age when God walked in the garden.

It is not the design of the gospel to make the world narrower, to impoverish life, to destroy any part of the almost infinite riches which were given us to enjoy; its task is the far more divine and difficult one of restoring all things to nobler uses. The distorted shall return to the divine form, the poisonous become food, the mischievous be returned into a blessing; all perverted things shall be redeemed from lust, blood, and selfishness, and restored in their time and place to honest and honourable use, to their high and holy purpose. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree."

XLVI

THE GRACIOUSNESS OF THE LAW

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.—JOHN v. 3.

EVERY commandment is a *salvation.* How is it that the commandments appear grievous? Because they cross our unnatural and inordinate desires. But what would be the result were those desires gratified? Pandemonium. The commandments save us; they save us from ourselves and the infinite peril of the unregenerate situation. The commandment enjoining love is to rescue us from the damnation of selfishness, the law of meekness to defend us from the devil of pride, the demand for purity to withhold us from the hell of lust. To resent the laws of Sinai is more foolish than to complain of the steel bars of the menagerie which come between us and the wild beasts. The grievousness is in ourselves, and the commandment is a glorious salvation from the evil within us which we have most to fear. Yet this is only a partial expression of the sense of the text. Not only are the commandments not grievous, they are *gracious.* Law and grace represent two orders of ideas, yet really, at bottom, divine law is the definition of love. Perhaps we might say that law

is the expression of love to a perfect universe, and grace is the added expression of love to a world of sinners, but love alike inspires law and gospel.

There are two kinds of grace—preventing grace and reclaiming grace. We usually extol redeeming grace, and we have every reason to do so. The grace that absolves our sins, covers our guilt, brings into our bosom abiding peace, is precious indeed. Yet preventing grace is not less precious. One of the grandest revelations of this preventing grace is seen in the clear and authoritative publication of the law. The will of God is expressed in nature, reason, and conscience; but it has become obscure, and having no other expression of it we might greatly err. In the commandments the obscured law shines out in letters of fire, and they who run may read. Moses reminded Israel of their great privilege in this respect. "For these nations which thou shalt possess, hearken unto them that practise augury, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do" (Deut. xviii. 14). Whilst these less-favoured people in their perplexity resorted to equivocal sources of enlightenment and fell into ruinous error, God in the law of the two tables showed Israel the path of truth and righteousness. So He now saves us. The commandment is not grievous, any more than the lighthouse—it is a warning, guiding, saving beacon. "So that the law is holy and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good."

Every commandment is an *inspiration*. The commandment would be grievous if it demanded what was beyond our power; it would be harsh if it demanded

what was only just within our power through severe strain and suffering. A tax is grievous as it exceeds the financial resources of a people; a lesson is grievous that is beyond the capacity or training of the scholar; a burden is grievous when too heavy to be borne. True, the implications of God's moral law are beyond our native strength: yet the commandments are not grievous; because, in these evangelical times, divine strength is given with the effort to obey. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," is now done through the strengthening grace of God vouchsafed in Christ Jesus. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light," is a great truth as it stands in the Old Testament; it is, however, an enlarged truth in these later days. Science assures us of the efficacy of light; it is not light only, but force—quickening, cleansing, compelling force. And the truth in Jesus is not merely dry light for the intellect, but vital force availing for interior purity and practical obedience. "Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you."

Read John xv. for the full understanding of the inward life and power which make obedience light. The fourth and fifth verses of the chapter whence our text is taken explain the text itself. When we are born of God and filled with faith and love, the keeping of the commandment is easy and delightful. The inner energy is equal to the whole incidence of duty. According to science the atmosphere rests upon us heavily, pressing to the weight of fifteen pounds to the square inch; and thus a grown man sustains a burden of about fifteen tons. But we know little if

anything of this burden. The gases and fluids inside our body press outwards, balancing the external pressure, and leaving us to walk at liberty. So far from the atmosphere being a burden, we know nothing lighter than air. It is somewhat thus with us in relation to the moral law. The lofty, sublime, exceedingly broad statutes of God do not crush us, do not weigh upon us, because our internal vigour is equal to them, our mind, affections, and will are so filled with heavenly power; in the strength and joy of the soul the law becomes as light as air, and as vital. If we feel the commandments pressing upon us heavily, it is a sign that the interior life needs uplifting and strengthening. "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." When the Master showed the immense sublimity of the law of forgiveness, the disciples did not ask that it should be modified to their weakness, but that through increased faith and force they might be equal to it in all its length and breadth.

Every commandment is a *benediction*. Not a salvation only, but a beatitude. "Moreover by them is Thy servant warned: in keeping of them there is great reward." Our whole perfecting is bound up with our obedience; only as we submit ourselves to divine control do we realize ourselves and all the great possibilities of our calling. No astronomer has yet been able to observe any evidence of a comet possessing a fixed axis of revolution, and most probably because

they have not yet acquired this law comets are so unorganized and so eccentric in their orbits; free from a fixed axis of revolution they wander at large with erratic movement, yet they remain chaotic, and do not develop into beautiful and fruitful planets. Yes; it is only as the love of God becomes the fixed axis of our being, and a close obedience to law the rule of our life, that we are fashioned into the full glory of our nature and enter upon its vast destiny of blessedness.

XLVII

VICARIOUS FAITH

And they come, bringing unto Him a man sick of the palsy, borne of four. . . . And Jesus seeing their faith saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven.—MARK ii. 3-5.

THE narrative teaches the necessity of action with a view to salvation, the ingenuity of love, and the efficacy of faith; but we will confine ourselves to the last point, and emphasize the singular character of the faith in question. "And Jesus seeing *their* faith." Amid the pitiless selfishness and chilling unbelief of the age, the scene here depicted must have been to the Master a sight as pleasant as it was unexpected, and very promptly and cordially He spoke the words of forgiveness. He distinctly recognized the faith of the bearers as well as that of the sufferer who was borne. Humanly speaking the palsied man owed his recovery and salvation to the faith and self-sacrifice of his four friends.

The great lesson comes out here that to an unknown extent it is possible to inspire and to bring about the salvation of others by our faith and co-operation. Our faith cannot supersede theirs, it is never a substitute for the faith of those more immediately concerned; but it prompts and strengthens their faith, and by a

consentaneousness of trust and effort a wonderful recovery is effected. And really in all this there is nothing exceptional or miraculous. In many ways we all owe much to the confidence of others working on our behalf, and many of us are deeply conscious of the debt. For much that we are, viewed from an intellectual and worldly point of view, and for much that we have achieved in social and material life, we are indebted to the faith and encouragement of those about us. They believed in us and for us, when we believed very faintly in and for ourselves; they derided our self-mistrust; they withstood our enemies; they assisted us with moral and material help; at even serious sacrifices they attacked the obstacles which stood in the way, and smoothed our path to success. One man is famous, another great, another rich, because at a critical juncture sympathetic associates stood by them, aided them, awoke their ambition and enthusiasm, and really carried them to victory. Thousands of distinguished men are such because they resolved to justify the confidence reposed in them, and to fulfil the prophecies hazarded on their behalf. It is simply wonderful how largely many of us are indebted for success to the confidence and expectations of parents, brethren, and compeers, backed up by their practical sympathy. Friendship is a wonderful factor in a struggling life, and friendship is based in mutual faith. Many a hesitating yet capable soul has perished in obscurity because of indiscreet and unsympathetic criticism at a crucial moment; whilst others, more fortunate, have grasped the golden prize and worn the victor's wreath because loving and heroic helpers pushed a way for

them through the crowd, broke up the roof, and let them down into the presence of fortune and glory.

What we can do for our friends circumstantially is even exceeded by what we can do for them touching character. A German writer justly observes: "Esteem your brother to be good, and he is so. Confide in the half-virtuous man, and he becomes wholly virtuous. Encourage your pupil by the assumption that he possesses certain faculties, and they will be developed in him." In moral attainment and efficiency vicarious faith, working by love, avails much. We must remember this in dealing with children. Let your child know that you believe in him, that you are satisfied as to his capacity and ability for goodness, without prophesying smooth things anticipate good things, and you have gone a long way toward making him all you could wish him to be. Your faith makes it easy for the child to believe. In the treatment of young persons generally this canon of education must be followed. Esteem them to be good, confide in them, assume that they are genuine and sincere, and your faith on their behalf stimulates and saves them. In dealing with the lapsed never forget this secret. The morally impotent and palsied, the blind and crippled, the leprous and dying, are saved by hope, and our hope may kindle that of the most forlorn and despairing. Seeing our faith the shipwrecked brother, perchance, takes heart again, and struggles into that higher life our charity painted for him. In our intercourse with one another let us always proceed on these grounds of mutual faith, love, and hope. And there is nothing quixotic in this belief in and for one

another, in and for the worst. All men have a great capacity for salvation; and faith, sympathy, and sacrifice work wonders.

The very best way in which we can serve our fellows is to get them to Christ; believing in Him and in His power to save those who come to Him, let us despair of no one. Let us imitate the courage of these bearers of the sick of the palsy. They dared much, and their boldness and aggressiveness carried the day. Let us imitate the sympathy of this ambulance corps. Without a real love to men we shall never undertake anything desperate on their behalf. Let us emulate the sacrificial spirit of these helpers of the helpless. After Christ has borne the cross for us we ought not to shrink from any burden that implies the salvation of the lost. Finally, let us be instructed by the combination of these heroic friends in the interest of the palsied. "Borne of four." Co-operation goes far in the salvation of men. Parent, teacher, preacher, and friend must unite if salvation is to come to the house. Iron chests holding great treasure are sometimes secured by three or four locks, and it is only by the concurrence of those who hold the several keys that the chest can be opened. Thus again and again the treasures of grace are reached only as two or three agree in prayer and effort. When Epworth parsonage was burnt, the child John Wesley was saved through an upper window by neighbours who stood on each other's shoulders. Thus the soul itself is often a brand plucked from the burning by the combined sympathies, supplications, and sacrifices of those who have caught the spirit of the Master.

XLVIII

THE GRANDEUR AND GRACIOUSNESS OF GOD

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.—Isa. lvii. 15, 16.

1. THE GRANDEUR of God.

He is the *supreme* One. The "high and lofty One." He stands above nature, law, necessity, fate, power, destiny, and all other such names as men have been pleased to give to the world, its laws, and its forces. He stands above humanity, dominating us, whatever may be our power, pride, or wrath. He stands above the unknown world, and its principalities. "God over all."

He is the *unchangeable* One. "Inhabiteth eternity." The eternally dwelling One. The hoary sea is a morning dewdrop; the stars are glittering fireworks; and the earth itself a vapour.

> They melt like mists the solid lands;
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

But with our God is no shadow of turning. He transcends time and space.

He is the *holy* One. "Whose name is holy." The very essence of God's grandeur. The levity, lust, and cruelty of pagan paradises are unknown in the heaven of revelation. Its Deity is the just One, the true, the righteous, the good, the merciful.

How impossible to speak worthily of God! of Him who fills the universe with His glory! A little while ago a great painter went out to paint the sunset. He prepared his palette, but the sight was so beautiful that he waited to examine it better. All about the skies and hills were rich shadows, resplendent colours, purple flames, golden lustres. The painter waited, waited, absorbed by the vision of glory. Said his friend, impatiently, "Are you not going to begin?" "By-and-by," replied the artist. And so he waited, paralyzed by the splendour, until the sun was set and dark shadows fell upon the mountains. Then he shut up his paint-box and returned home. But if we faint thus in the presence of God's lower works, how impossible is it to speak adequately of Him whom no man hath seen nor can see! Yet it is well sometimes to recall the grandeur of God. Let us shun familiarities and sentimentalisms, and live in wonder and reverence.

2. The GRACIOUSNESS of God.

"With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." "God has two thrones," says an old writer; "one in the highest heaven, the other in the lowliest heart." He is not power only, not intellect only, but love, tenderness, sympathy. He comprehends all the pathos of human life. He is full of pity. He is

patient. He is ready to forgive. He waits to be gracious. He is Creator, Ruler, Judge, but Father always, full of mysterious sovereign love.

This thought is precious in *the days of penitence.* God is great and terrible in majesty, and in the days of repentance we think of Him and are troubled. We are afraid of His knowledge, holiness, and power. Our own heart condemns us, and He is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Full of sin, shame, and misery we shrink from the glory of His Presence. In such times remember the latter part of the text: "I dwell with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." He will moderate His anger; He will be gracious unto us. As the sun lifts up the grass and flowers beaten by the storm, gently, caressingly, availingly, so the good Spirit comforts and raises the soul bruised and bowed down in penitence. Fear God, but do not be afraid of Him; take hold of His strength that you may make peace with Him, and you shall make peace.

The knowledge of the divine graciousness is precious, as it finds expression in all *the education of the soul.* "For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls which I have made." It is the same idea as that of the psalmist: "He will not always chide." In human training there is far too much chiding. The parent too often indulges in irritating, disheartening criticism. The schoolmaster succeeds, insisting chiefly on the pupil's forgetfulness and blundering. The apprenticeship of the youth leaves nothing unsaid about

his weakness and incompetence. Throughout our education are endless fault-seeking, fault-finding, fault-magnifying, fault-remembering. The effect is unquestionably hurtful. Hearing only of our bad points, and always hearing of them, of our ignorance, idleness, stupidity, and failure, we are terribly discouraged, and the marvel is that we turn out half as well as we do. This is not the method of the divine education. If it were, the spirit would fail before Him. He ever gives us assurances of His sympathy and stimulates us to effort. His Spirit speaks in the sinking heart words of cheer, affection, approbation, and hope, of sweet refreshment, of strong consolation. When a picture by a great master is to be restored, it is not entrusted to an amateur; it is not a fitting subject for turpentine, sandpaper, and pumice-stone. A great restorer must be found, and such a restorer is as rare as an original artist. But think of restoring a soul, of bringing out the possible grace and glory of the human spirit! Only He who created the soul can restore it, and He can restore it only in infinite tenderness. If He were harsh the spirit would fail before Him, but gently He removes each spot and stain until the image of His own immortal beauty shines forth again. "Thy gentleness hath made me great."

The divine graciousness softens *all the discipline of life.* Some write and speak as though there was nothing else in the world but law, logic, and force, and as though all must go to the wall that cannot bear the ruthless ordeal. Hence the dictum of Diderot: "The world is the abode of the strong." But there is something else in the world beside law and force; pity,

sympathy, and love assert themselves—there is the heart. An illogical something, known as compassion and tenderness, works in human life; or, if not illogical, having a transcendent logic of its own. There is a sublime tempering element, perpetually saving a race trembling on the brink of destruction. "The world is for the strong"; yes, and for the humble, the meek, the pure, for those who are crucified through weakness, all of whom God cunningly hides in His secret place. Do not be afraid; terrible as life may often seem, there is a genius of grace in it, converting its severity into a mode of salvation and perfecting.

XLIX

SPASMODIC PIETY

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away.—Hos. vi. 4.

ALL kinds of workers are conscious of moments in which they awake to uncommon power and excellence. These inspired moments are rare, wonderful, delightful episodes of the intellectual life. Similar seasons occur in our mortal and spiritual experience. We see the ideal, are visited by high and holy thought and feeling, are ashamed of our inferiority, vividly see what we ought to be, receive a sudden influx of power, and resolve to lead a worthier life. The greatest villains are not strange to these hours. The ordinary sinner also knows these special times of illumination and conviction. The covetous are ashamed of their selfishness, and startle everybody by unwonted acts of generosity; the angry see the miserable character of their impatience, and become unnaturally amiable; whilst the intemperate take the pledge, and even become intemperate on water. Above and beyond all this, the worldly and unsaved are aroused, and, realizing the guilt and misery of their godless days, resolve upon a new life of spirituality

and consecration. They reflect, they repent, they amend. This gracious state is brought about in various ways—by calamities and sorrows, by special mercies and blessings, by the message of the pulpit, and often simply by the direct action of the Spirit upon the conscience and heart. Much that is mysterious pertains to the higher moods of artists, poets, and musicians, they cannot explain the sudden illumination and impulse; and the spiritual agitation is still more mysterious. But, however brought about, the sinner is aroused and more or less sincerely repents.

Yet all these exercises of mind, these stirrings of the heart, these good resolutions prove vain. Nothing permanent comes of it. The villain who gives a transient glimpse of nobility is again a villain. The reformed miser, tyrant, drunkard, or sensualist returns to his wallowing in the mire. The worldling once more surrenders himself to the carnal elements. Thus multitudes are inconstant, fitful, wavering. Their goodness never lasts: ever beginning anew, then relapsing; ever making a show of leaves, good feelings, aspirations, resolves, and yet bearing no fruit unto everlasting life. Mark,

1. *The extreme unsatisfactoriness of fitful piety.* It is rather the fashion to regard such piety with some degree of appreciation. We are thought to be not altogether bad when good days and deeds are placed to our credit. These flashes of a higher self and life are supposed to signify and atone for much. But it is a perilous mistake. When we are told that a person has "lucid moments," we know that he is in a parlous condition; if he is not in an asylum, he ought

to be. And it is much the same with those who have lucid moments of the spiritual and moral life. Their fits of goodness show their capacity to be noble, their character to be base. It has been urged apologetically that "We are all good sometimes"; but the inmates of an asylum might plead that "We are all sensible sometimes." Neither party is redeemed by such interludes. Lucid moments only accentuate the tragedy of madness; and spasms of goodness in a bad life only demonstrate and intensify the tragedy of sin.

No, there is no value in transient goodness; it lacks the main characteristic of the essential thing. The charm of certain sights lies in their fugitiveness. The momentariness of the bubble is the secret of its delight; a snowflake is lovely in its exquisite frailty; we sing of never-withering flowers, but we should care little for them if they bloomed at our feet; and as Goethe says, no one would linger over a rainbow that stood for a quarter of an hour. The source of the fascination of these things lies in their perishableness. Goodness, however, belongs to an altogether different sphere. He who is alone good knows no shadow of turning, and the more stable our goodness the nearer it approaches the absolute standard. To play fast and loose with the fear and service of God is repeatedly reprobated by the Old Testament. In the New Testament our Lord teaches the obligation of permanence. "Abide in Me, and I in you." It is not enough to enjoy blest moments; He must abide in us, and we in Him, for all time, and when time shall be no longer. Revelation puts no value on sudden exuberance of feeling, on surprised confession, on temporary panic

or ecstasy, on the glow and gleam that die away into coldness and darkness. "Persistence is the sign of reality." Whatever does not persist may be fancy, sentiment, imagination, or hysteria; but it is not the righteousness of God, nor does it avail in His sight. Such emotion is no more real goodness than a dewdrop is a diamond, a gourd a cedar, or a meteor a star.

These brief seasons are all too short to bring to any kind of maturity the faint beginnings of higher qualities and graces. A distinguished traveller tells of a certain region of Asia where the night temperature is below the freezing-point all the year round, with the exception of a couple of weeks in the middle of summer. What may be expected here when for a few days the glass gets above freezing? What flowers will bloom? What kind of harvest will be reaped? What vintage will be gathered? There can be nothing but pathetic, abortive beginnings, dubious signs of life falling back into death and darkness. It is much the same with fugitive penitence. "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." And how can He accept those obscure stirrings of life which get no farther than microscopic shoots, cryptogamic vegetation, and low water-weeds?

The spasmodic saint must not rank himself with the true saints of God. The difference between them is simply infinite. It is a curious experience when at sea you behold for the first time the flying fish. They suddenly spring out of the depths, skim the waves, cut the air, and you would not be surprised to see them take to the heavens. In a few moments, however, their power of flight is exhausted, and they flop again into

the depths whence they emerged. It is wonderful certainly, yet it is a mild form of flying. How different with the genuine bird of the air—the lark singing at heaven's gate, the eagle soaring towards the sun, the swallow winging its flight half across the world! Flying fish and mounting bird belong to different worlds, although they may resemble each other for a moment. So the distinction is practically infinite between the ineffectual struggles of the spasmodic penitent and the consecrated life that perseveres through sunshine and storm, through months and years, soaring on eagle's wings, running without being weary, and walking without fainting.

2. *How may we convert these awakenings of the soul into abiding goodness?* So many fail in the spiritual life because they do not take measures to perpetuate the higher life that these precious visitations of grace initiate. A French writer observes, "Poetry is not a permanent state of the soul"; and it is certain that no high, intense mood may long abide. The artist does not continue in an inspired condition, but he understands how to take advantage of it, and by care and diligence to perpetuate whatever he has happily gained. The astronomer finds only a few days in a year when the vision of the heavens is perfect, but he acts so promptly and practically in these privileged hours that they enrich the rest of his lifetime. The great thing is to take care that the times of our spiritual visitation do not exhaust themselves in cries, sobs, tears, and fruitless emotion, but that they are seized, economized, and perpetuated. We must follow on to know the Lord. By wise and practical effort we must

fix the gracious inspiration. Having chosen our part we must abide by it, and pursue it. By good books, habits of prayer, devout companionship, and immediate consecration to some form of social service we must seek to complete our conversion.

L

THE CHOIR INVISIBLE AND THEIR MUSIC

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.—LUKE XV. 10.

IN the higher universe the true value of things is known, and this peep into glory is most instructive.

We are taught the significance of the individual. "Over *one* sinner." It is often seen how Christ sets at nought the tyranny of numbers, and concentrates attention on the unit. In His reference to the lilies of the field this tendency is manifest. He does not say that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like gorgeous landscape or blooming meadow, but he "was not arrayed like *one* of these." Again, in enforcing unselfishness. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto *one* of these little ones a cup of cold water only . . shall in no wise lose his reward." And in the text the angels rejoice over "*one* sinner." We should not have been surprised had the joy been over a penitent orb; but it is not that. A day of Pentecost, with its thousands of penitents, might seem to justify a grand outburst of song; but it is not that. Millennial times might bring

down a cloud of angels filling the sky with hallelujahs; but it is not this. "Over one sinner." Christ discovered humanity; there was no sense of the solidarity of the race before He came: yet He also discovered the individual, for there was no recognition of the value of the single soul before He came. It is remarkable how much Christ individualized—how frequently the word "one" was upon His lip. Let us not permit ourselves to be lost in a crowd; nor must we suffer in our self-respect because of multitudes and magnitudes.

One of the very foremost teachings of Jesus Christ declares the supreme worth of personality. In these days we are ever being dazed by arithmetic; we are bluntly assured that worlds and histories turn on vast hinges, whilst individual lives are the dust of the balances; and society, collectivism, and humanity are most familiar terms of contemporary politics and philosophy, until the individual is well-nigh forgotten. Continents and mountains are always in evidence, whilst the atom remains invisible; and the individual is being similarly ignored in the social mass. Christ writes across the sky in blazing letters, *"One."* The lowliest must not forget his mysterious greatness nor the fact that in the highest world his fortune is followed with impassioned interest. He knew, who told us this.

A further lesson of the text is that the importance of the individual lies in his moral life. "One *sinner.*" In that world where the true value of things is known we are recognized on our moral and spiritual side. Social status, mental culture, or financial ability is disregarded by the angels; they concern themselves only with our relation to the holy God. The heavenly

universe is interested exclusively in the history of souls. How different with us! We survey life from an altogether different standpoint; and gold, culture, greatness, or pleasure is the consuming theme of our contemplation. If the celestial world is absorbed in the history of the soul, ought we not to concern ourselves far more than we usually do with the inner life? We are most attentive to worldly fortune; success or failure in social and material life is never long out of our thoughts, and we rarely pause to ask ourselves how we stand with God. The state of the soul, the movements of the spiritual life, and the rise or fall of character are recognized by us only in glimpses, yet they fill the eye of God and angels. Earth scans the surface of history; Heaven studies the soul of history, which is the history of the soul.

The final lesson we note is that the most important event in the individual life is the restoration of the lapsed soul to God. "One sinner that *repenteth.*" He who came into the world to revalue all our values declares that the return of the prodigal son to his heavenly Father is the most momentous of all acts. Repentance means the consciousness of sin. Sin in its essence is ungodliness, the leaving of the Father for a far country. The creature divorced from the Creator, the gift severed from the Giver, here is the inmost essence of sin. He who truly repents knows that he has shut out God, substituted his own will for God's will, used God's gifts without God's blessing. "I will arise, and go unto my father," is of the very essence of repentance. Repentance means also a horror of sin. We awake to its ugliness, bitterness, shameful-

ness, and peril. It is astonishing how lightly the natural man thinks of sin! He is far more troubled by a physical infirmity than by a moral fault. He will rather suffer a bad conscience than a bad tooth; he will tolerate a vile disposition, and resent a squint; he will prefer a cloven foot before a club foot. And he is far more distressed by an error in language or manners than by a breach of the higher law. A misfit in dress offends him more than his base act; a slip in grammar humiliates him more than a slip into sensual mire; a trifling breach in etiquette causes him to blush as he never does for his wickedness. In repentance all this is changed. He sees the unreasonableness, hatefulness, and wretchedness of his evil passions and ways, loathes them, and shrinks from them with shame and distress. Finally, repentance means the renunciation of the life of disobedience, and a trustful return to the heavenly Father. "They have turned to Me the back, and not the face" (Jer. xxxii. 33). In repentance we turn clean round, and look with desire upon God and His holy will. In the strength of Christ's grace, on the grounds of His merit, we return to our Father's love, house, and service.

How vividly this narrative brings out the blessedness of repentance! God rejoices. "In the *presence* of the angels." And we can understand His joy. The human heart is our best mirror of God; the brother's heart, the sister's, the lover's, the friend's, the father's and mother's heart. As in water face answereth face, so the heart of God is reflected in the heart of man; only turbid elements make the glorious

image dim. How, then, do we rejoice, when the lost returns! It is most human that we should rejoice, and what is most truly human is most nearly divine. Strange and blessed thought! God rejoices in our repentance unto life. The angels also rejoice. When the tide rises in the ocean, it rises in a thousand creeks and rivers; and when the sunny sea of God's blessedness swells, it streams through the celestial universe, and fresh music everywhere breaks out like the sound of many waters. But if repentance is an event to make heaven glad, is it not one to make us glad also? It is, indeed, the beginning of true peace and felicity. "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel."

What a powerful encouragement to repentance this passage affords! The penitent finds it a severe task to overcome the difficulties which lie in his path. The hostile elder brother stands for many disheartening influences. But "the morning stars" are elder brothers who stand by the penitent. "The angels laid hold upon his hand." (Gen. xix. 16.) Beautiful scene! So now, repentant sinner! if Sodom mocks, there is with you a vast world of divine, angelic, and saintly sympathy. More are with you than can possibly be against you.

LI

THE MERCY OF MYSTERY

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.—Prov. xxv. 2.

THE meaning of things and events is to us largely incomprehensible; we cannot order our speech aright because of the darkness. This fact often frets us, we feel that an injustice is being done us, we complain of the weary weight of an unintelligible world. But the text sets the matter in another light. "It is the glory of God," the wisdom and love of God, "to conceal a thing." The motive of mystery is generous, it contemplates our safety and advantage.

So far as the universe itself is concerned this is true. What we know of the world is as nothing compared with what we do not know. The secret always escapes us—the secret of matter, of life, of the origin and ending of things. We ought not to be surprised that this is so. To a certain extent this mystery arises out of the greatness of God, and the necessary inscrutableness of His infinite working. A child cannot understand the higher mathematics, a peasant follow a philosophical discussion, a savage comprehend the Atlantic telegraph; and the greatest human mind cannot grasp the universe. That the

whole scheme of things can ever be known by us is absurd, for the creature can never overtake the Creator, the finite comprehend the Infinite. Yet it is true that we might know much more of the universe than we do. Why, then, does not God flash upon us the secrets for which our scientists and philosophers search with aching brain? Why does He not light up the material universe, and make clear its secret workings? "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." Illumination is regulated by practical good, and must not outstrip moral progress. Hidden things are revealed as fast as the knowledge of them can advantage our whole being. The desire to know may be nothing more than an impertinent curiosity, a proud and delirious ambition, and Heaven concedes nothing to this inordinate speculative temper. To each succeeding age secrets are disclosed, according to its needs and fitness. We might easily get more light than would be a blessing. Pilots object to the electric light in lighthouses because it perplexes and blinds them; a gentler, softer light is better for practical purposes. So God does not grant a succession of brilliant lights for ends of pride, vanity, or amusement. He slowly explains His works that we may be kept humble and reverent by their mysterious immensity and magnificence, and that every addition to our knowledge may be a practical good—a mental, material, moral, and spiritual blessing.

Another illustration is found *in the unfolding of the divine government.* Great inventions and discoveries familiar to us were denied the old civilizations. Why did God so long jealously guard these secrets? Not

because He was arbitrary or ungenerous, but in loving care for His creatures. The welfare of man regulates progressive illumination. If in the morning of time those who possessed a crude knowledge of the arts and sciences, with colossal pride built Babel, what frightful outrages would they have perpetrated possessed of modern wealth and knowledge! The tyranny and slavery of Egypt and Assyria were terrible enough with horses and chariots; what would they have been with steam and electricity! The Jews were in constant peril because the navy of Solomon every three years brought gold, ivory, and peacocks; what would have been their state had the fleets of the world anchored in their ports, as they do in ours! The Romans were destructive enough with bows and arrows, slings and stones, swords and spears; think what they would have been with gunpowder and dynamite! The Greeks were voluptuous enough with the modest resources of their age; imagine their carnivals of ruinous pleasure had they commanded the diamond-mines of Kimberley, the gold-fields of Johannesburg, the luxuries of all climates! God denied the treasures which would have rendered progress impossible; He withheld them until the race had attained those higher qualities without which excessive material power is a curse. The material progress of the world is conditioned by its moral fitness. We do not allow a child to play with matches, poisons, razors, and live wires; and God did not trust the childhood of the race with the awful resources of knowledge, wealth, and power involved in modern civilization. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest be in health and pros-

per, *even as thy soul prospereth.*" This is the law of the world's enrichment and illumination, and it is a law of love.

Another illustration of our theme is found *in the impartation of spiritual knowledge.* The Bible we know as revelation, yet it has immensely widened the range of mystery. How much there is in it that we do not understand! and we are often impatient with the mystery of godliness. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." Christ came only "in the fullness of time"; before then the Advent would have been worse than useless. Even when He came He observed a striking reticence in addressing the multitude. "And with many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it: and without a parable spake He not unto them; but privately to His own disciples. He expounded all things." Nay, even to the disciples He could not tell all. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth." The physician cannot always tell his patient all the truth concerning his position—it would retard the sick man's recovery, perhaps cost him his life; so he is told only as he is able to bear it, only as it will be good for him to know. So Heaven deals with us in loving discretion. Little do we know what we ask when we ask for the fullness of the light! The holiness of God, the wrath of God, the love of God! To see all our sin, all our peril! To see the universe of glory, to penetrate the secret of the prison-house! Were it flashed upon us, it would blind, paralyze, destroy. We are saved by the gen-

tleness which filters out the light a ray at a time. Infinite mercy grants no more.

> A veil 'twixt us and Thee, dread Lord,
> A veil 'twixt us and Thee;
> Lest we should hear too clear, too clear,
> And unto madness see!

We understand high and holy truths only as we treat them seriously and apply them practically. God explains them to us through *experience*. Just as the scientist learns the truths of nature through experiment, so we learn the highest truths through experience. We know the heavenly doctrine through its action on our conscience, heart, and will. God illuminates us through *character*. Would you know more? Get higher qualities and graces. We are illuminated through *obedience*. Revelation is granted through duty. We learn divinest secrets in *prayer*. A very little fellow, whose mother failed to explain his difficulties, answered, "Mother, you have not told me much; I wish that I could have five minutes with God." Our five minutes with God go a long way. So light is not given to theorists, for knowledge that puffeth up is no gain; light steals upon us through personal sanctification, practical obedience, hallowed devotion, and every truth thus apprehended is the light of life, filling us with strength, purity, and joy.

LII

THE HOUR, AND THE DIVINE DELIVERER

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.—GAL. iv. 4, 5.

THE *period* of Christ's manifestation. It has often been pointed out that when certain characters are wanted they inevitably appear. When the hour strikes the man arrives, the man exactly suited to the hour. "The tools of history are never inappropriate. A Dante is not produced when history requires a Luther. Philosophical and contemplative natures are not produced when history requires practical and heroic natures. Providence makes no mistake, there is always harmony between the special gifts of individuals and the requirements of history." This harmony was never more strikingly illustrated than in the age of the Advent. Christ is the centre of the history of the world, and there could be no error in the date of His appearance. The race had proved its inability to restore itself to lost truth, purity, and happiness. Through the discipline of the Mosaic law, and of natural law, Jew and Gentile were pre-

pared for a spiritual, redeeming religion. And the state of the political world corresponded with the exigencies of a universal faith. "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son." Nothing in nature is more wonderful than the way in which complementary things and creatures arrive together; and in history the same phenomenon is repeated. "God's trains never keep one another waiting." Events synchronize and harmonize. The Incarnation is the crowning example of the dramatic unities of history.

The *nature* of this manifestation. "God sent forth His Son." "Born of a woman." Christ was the revelation of God in the sphere of time and sense. The splendour of Jehovah was veiled by the seamless robe; under the mechanism of frail flesh throbbed the energy which built the world; the gentle tones of the voice unheard in the streets disguised the accents of the thunder; and beneath the weakness which slept, fainted, and expired was hidden the might of Omnipotence. That Christ was God; that He became man, possessing a true human body and a true human soul, is the distinct teaching of the evangelic narrative. God manifests Himself in nature, history, and conscience; but here is a supreme, personal, and unique revelation of Himself—the divine clothing Himself with the human that He might redeem the human.

There is nothing in this manifestation contrary to the divine *greatness.* The grandeur of God is not founded on those visible splendours with which we surround Him. Without a throne of awful brightness, without crowns either on His head or at His feet,

without ten thousand times ten thousand angels, without the dust of gold and blaze of jewels, He is still the only wise God, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Divested of all those glories which appeal to our imagination, His real greatness is untouched. His greatness is that of supreme wisdom, righteousness, and love; and with these perfections He is equally great, whether invested by the splendours of the heavens, or manifested in the simplicity of "the man Christ Jesus."

There is nothing contrary to the divine *honour*. If there is nothing derogatory to the honour of God in His dwelling within the physical universe, and in manifesting Himself through suns and stars, hills and seas, forests and flowers, there cannot be anything contrary to the divine glory in assuming that He should take up His special abode in a human body, and reveal Himself through its marvellous organs. There seems, indeed, no shrine so fitting for the divine indwelling and manifestation as a pure human body. "The human face divine" can express more than a sun, the rounded forehead speak more than arched skies, the eyes shine out deeper things than stars, the lip reveals secrets which winds and waves can never utter, and the actions of human life are rich in suggestion hidden from the foundations of the world. The human body is less bright than the heavens, less large than the earth, but to utter things deep and high a finer organ than either.

There is nothing contrary to the divine *purity*. Impurity is not an idea inseparable from human nature, and the New Testament takes care that the Incarnation is freed from all suspicion of that sinfulness by

which the flesh has been defiled. It is reasonable to think that God would come near to us in a way that we could know Him, take hold of Him, love and serve Him. And He has thus manifested Himself (1 John i. 1-3).

The *design* of this manifestation. "That He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." In a word, the purpose of the Incarnation was to convert the slaves of sin into the sons of God (Rom. viii. 3, 4). Our Lord lived and died that He might show us the glory of righteousness; that He might open the way for our forgiveness and reconciliation with Heaven; and that He might endue us with the Spirit of purity and might, enabling us to attain to holiness of heart and life. In Him our emancipation from sin is most complete. We die to the old life of actual sin and formal righteousness; we live in the power of faith, purity, and love. We once heard an Oriental relate that when he was converted to Christianity his old angry fellow religionists treated him as a dead man, building his tomb, and following a bier to the graveyard. It was the glorious truth in a parable. He who is truly converted by the grace of Christ is dead to sin, and all the vices follow his bier. Bereaved passion is there, with wild cries and gnashing of teeth; loathsome lust sorrows as one without hope; mammon mourns a slave who has slipped his shining fetters; pride stalks along in grief because eyes so long dazzled with power and purple have strangely forgotten their sight; falsehood for once lays aside his mask and is inconsolable, bereaved of a familiar friend; selfishness bemoans a lost son; and all the

daughters of guilty pleasure despairingly cast into the dust the poison-flowers the dead will no longer wear. The devil follows as the chief mourner; the rabble of the vices weep and blaspheme; and the epitaph reads, "How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein?" But out of this grave rises a new man in the power of Christ's resurrection. Walking in newness of life he is conscious of freedom, strength, and joyfulness which are truly heavenly. The miserable slave groaning under bondage has become a son of God, sitting in heavenly places and enjoying the liberty of the glory.

LIII

THE IMPLIED PROMISE OF NATURE AND LIFE

And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meal offering at our hand, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would at this time have told such things as these.—JUDGES xiii. 22, 23.

MANOAH was greatly troubled by the wonderful appearances recorded in the context: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." But his wife took a more reasonable and hopeful view of the situation. She argues from the analogy of things that God means to deal graciously with them. She reasons from the known to the unknown, from the present to the future, from the segment to the circle. In days of mystery, perplexity, and ominousness we cannot do better than follow out this special line of reasoning; we cannot do better than resort to this argument as we enter upon a new, unknown year. Instead of yielding to panic and despair, let us deal with threatening problems in the light of reflection, experience, and history; let us strengthen ourselves by a reference to the secret analogy of things.

"If the Lord were pleased to kill us, would He have showed us all these things?"

Look at the question *in relation to this present life and its anxieties.* How we torment ourselves about our earthly future! Life would be worth living were it not for to-morrow; to-morrow poisons all the days of the calendar. But if the Lord were pleased to degrade and destroy us, would He have shown us all these things of nature's wealth and glory? We cannot survey the teeming treasures of earth and sky without feeling that God means to deal generously with us. Ruskin declared that there was beauty enough in a lily to decorate a cathedral; and our Lord found truth and grace enough in a lily to furnish a creed for that cathedral—a creed of absolute trust in our heavenly Father. Every sunbeam, every shower, every sheaf rebukes our scepticism and despair. If the design of God were sinister, if He were pleased to forsake us, to abandon us to hunger and nakedness, to torment and destroy us, would He have thus filled our world with riches and splendour? In revelation we have exceeding great promises in black and white, whilst in nature are millions more promises in gold and purple, and God means to keep them all. In our personal history, too, how wondrously has He blessed us! When tempted to dark fears, think of what God is likely to do by the gracious things He has already shown you in nature and life. Every gift and deliverance of the past are also a prophecy and promise. In granting us these things He contracts engagements to us; His past favours lay Him under a necessity of conferring other favours; He must be consistent

with Himself, and finish what He has begun. He must honour His own government.

As to the future beyond this world and life, the argument of the text holds. If God meant to annihilate us, would He have dealt with us after the wonderful fashion with which we are so familiar? What immense ages He took to prepare this earth for our habitation! How infinitely vast and magnificent is the universe which inspheres us! How inexhaustible are the treasures which mainly design our welfare! If God proposed to annihilate us, would He have shown us all these things and lavished upon us such endless gifts? Is it like Him to do so? Is it like His wisdom? Scientists tell us of a law of nature that they describe as the law of parsimony; that is, nature does not permit any waste of material, time, or energy, the means to any given end being always regulated by stern economy. But what becomes of this law of parsimony if after Heaven has lavished so much upon us it extinguishes us? Annihilation does not correspond with the wisdom of God as reflected in nature. Is it like His goodness to destroy us? Life is positively cruel if nothing more than a tantalizing flash. When the Aztecs managed to capture several of the Spanish invaders, the captives were surprised to find that they were treated most hospitably; abundant provision was forthcoming, and they were regaled with every delicacy; but when they discovered that they were being fattened for sacrifice, they lost their appetite, and could no longer touch the luxuries spread before them. All the pride of life is gone, all the sweetness and glory and joy of things vanish the moment we really believe

that we are reserved for the carnival of the worms. Fearing annihilation, we are all our lifetime in bondage to the fear of death, and can know nothing of the goodness of God and the preciousness of living. Is it like the divine faithfulness to destroy us? Does nature implant instincts it does not mean to gratify? Does God excite hopes in us that He does not intend to fulfil? "He satisfieth the desire of every living thing." Will He then mock the sublimest desire of all—the instinct of immortality? No; He does not mean to destroy us. The grandeur of the world, of which we are the chief aim; the splendour of our faculties; the costliness of our education; the munificence of our treatment,—these, one and all, are prophecies and pledges of great things prepared for faithful souls. We shall not die like dogs; the grass of the churchyard shall not cover our great being and hope.

> When grim Death doth take me by the throat
> Thou wilt have pity on Thy handiwork.

"If the Lord were pleased to kill us, would He have told such things as these?" God has not only shown us many wonderful things; He has also spoken many wonderful words. The great silence of eternity has been broken, and we have listened to mighty messages of love and hope. Seers have risen in all nations and ages, teaching doctrines which stretch far beyond this life and its interests. In Egypt, Assyria, Persia, India, China, Greece, and Rome poets and philosophers taught truths which transcend the trivial and mortal, and assume a vaster world and destiny than the pres-

ent. In Judea patriarchs, lawgivers, psalmists, and prophets enforced high and holy doctrines which are foolishness if this life is all. Last of all in this circle God spake to us by His Son, spake words pulsating with eternity. And in each generation since then great teachers have appeared protesting against animalism and materialism; warning their contemporaries that they are men not beasts, and eloquently conjuring them to live for higher ends than those of terrestrial advantage and indulgence. Our own age has been illuminated by Carlyle, Emerson, Ruskin, and Tennyson, who have appealed to our spirituality and aroused us from sordid life to grasp the prizes of a higher world. We may not always be able to distinguish very clearly between a sky-sign and a star, between the fancies of men trusting to the heavens and the authorized messages of eternity; but, whatever falsities and errors may cloud and confuse our vision, God has never permitted us to lose sight of immortal ideas, beliefs, and hopes—the truths of eternity have been kept before us high, clear, solemn, like the Milky Way in the midnight heaven.

Has God spoken all these words in vain? There is more truth in the nature of things than this. He would not have addressed us thus had we been worms of the earth, moths of a moment. He would not have told us such things about Himself, about ourselves, about the world above us, about the ages of the past, about the ages to come. And when God speaks these great words we grasp His meaning. We are constantly being told of the sagacity of animals, of their marvellous intelligence and cleverness, the intention being to

humble us by the thought that we are at last one with the beasts which perish. But we may easily reassure ourselves. Read Plato to your parrot, try the Iliad on the gorilla, declaim Shakespeare to swine, or attempt to disclose the visions of Isaiah and St. John in the kennels, and you elicit no response, or a very coarse one. But the great words of God find us, thrill us, alarm us; they inspire us with fear, wonder, or delight. There is a measureless gulf between us and the brute. Surely God would not thus have spoken to us, we should not thus have comprehended Him, had we been only creatures of a day. Let us not say, "We shall die because we have seen God"; but rather, "We shall live because we have seen Him, and because He has spoken to us the words of eternal life."

If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have revealed His grace as He has done. The fear of Manoah arose out of the sense of sin; but, in so many words, his wife replies, "True we are sinners, yet God has accepted our sacrifice, and shown us tokens for good, and He would not have done this had He meant to destroy us." Does not this argument hold with us? A great sacrifice comes between us and God—the accepted Sacrifice of Calvary; and does not this avail on our behalf? "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." By virtue of this offering God has assured us of forgiveness, vouchsafed the sense of His favour, kindled in our heart, love, peace, and hope; and is it likely that He will abandon us? In our Christian experience we find the prophecy and promise of immortality.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." "Now He that wrought us for this very thing is God, who gave unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

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